

# INFATUATION

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# INFATUATION

BY  
LLOYD OSBOURNE

AUTHOR OF  
The Motomaniacs, The Adventurer, Etc.

With Illustrations by  
KARL ANDERSON

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# INFATUATION

## CHAPTER I

Phyllis Ladd lost her mother at twelve; and this bereavement, especially terrible to an only child, brought with it two consequences that had a far-reaching effect on her character. An ardent, high-strung nature, acquainted so early with a poignant sorrow, gets an outlook on the world that is so just and true as to constitute a misfortune in itself. A child ought not to think; ought not to suffer; ought not to understand. Individuality, sympathy, sensibility awaken—qualities that go to make a charming human being—but which have to be paid for in the in-

cessant balance of our complex existence. Phyllis' school-fellows were no longer the same to her; she felt herself a person apart; though she played as gaily as any of them, and chattered her head off, and tripped blithely along Chestnut Avenue entwined in the arms of her companions, she was aware, down in her secret heart, that she was "different."

At twelve, then, her path diverged from the commonplace, in which, as we all have to admit, however reluctantly, the chances for a happy life are best.

The second consequence of her mother's death was to bring her into contact with a scarcely known individual—her father. This grave, handsome man, who sat behind a newspaper at breakfast, and who was not seen again till dinner time; who drove away every morning behind a liveried coachman and a pair of shining bays to a region called "the office"; whose smile and voice were always a shy delight to her—this demigod, admired, unknown, from whom there emanated a delicious sense of security and strength, now suddenly drew her to his heart, and became her world, her all.

Robert T. R. Ladd was the president of the K. B. and O. Railway. Rich himself, and the son of a rich man, his interests in Carthage were varied and many, engaging his activities far beyond the great road that was associated with his name. Carthage was an old-fashioned city; and the boys who had grown up together and succeeded their fathers were clannish to a degree little known in the newer parts of this country. Joe, who was prominent in electricity and gas, might want to consolidate a number of scattered plants, and to that end would seek the assistance of Tom and Harry and Bob. George, perhaps, in forecasting the growth of Carthage a little too generously, was in temporary straits with his land-scheme—well, he would ask Tom and Bob to tide him over, making a company of himself, and taking them in. Frank and his brother, in converting their private bank into the Fifth National—induced as much as anything by the vanity of seeing their own names on their own greenbacks—would feel the need of a strong local man on the new directorate. Would Bob oblige them? "Why, with pleasure, though if somebody else would do as well—" "Oh, we must have *you*, old fellow."

Such was Carthage—at least the Carthage of Chestnut Avenue, of the long lines of stately and beautiful mansions on what was called the West Side, the Carthage that supported the Symphony Orchestra, owned the parterre boxes at the opera, dined, drove, danced, and did business together—as compact and jealous a little aristocracy as any in Hungary or Silesia. Of course there was another Carthage—several other Carthages—one a teeming riverside quarter where English was an unknown tongue, a place black with factory chimneys, full of noise and refuse, dirt and ugliness, where forty thousand nondescript foreigners pigged together, and contributed forty thousand pairs of very grimy and unwill-

ing hands to the material advancement of the city and state. There was a business Carthage, with banks and sky-scrapers, and vast webs of wires that darkened the sky. There was a pleasure Carthage that awoke only at night, blazing out with a myriad lights, and a myriad enticements. There was a middle-class residence Carthage; a second-class residence Carthage; an immense, poor, semi-disreputable, altogether dreary Carthage that was popularly alluded to as "South of the slot," the name dating from the time of the first cable-car line, now long since discarded.

But to return to Phyllis Ladd.

In losing her mother, it might be said she had discovered her father. At first perhaps it was pity, loneliness, almost terror that caused Mr. Ladd to take this little creature in his arms, and hold her as he might a shield. He had idolized his wife; he hardly knew how to go on living without her; one day, in his office, as his old friend Latham was leaving him, he had pulled open a drawer, and taken a loaded revolver from it. "Latham," he said, with a very slight tremor in his voice, "would you mind putting this damned thing in your pocket—I—I—find it tempts me."

Yes, his little daughter was a shield; he held her slim body between himself and despair; he told her this again and again, as he sat with bowed head and suffusing eyes in the shadow of an irrevocable happiness. And she in whom there stirred, mysteriously, dimly, the tenderness of the sublime love that had called her into being—she, even while she mingled her tears with his, felt within herself the welling of an exquisite joy. To love, to solace, to protect, here again instincts were prematurely awakened; here again her little feet departed from the commonplace to carry her far afield.

In time, as weeks and months rolled on, the blow, so unendurable at first, so crushing and terrible, softened, as such things will, and a busy world again engrossed a busy man. But the intimacy between father and daughter remained, and continued unimpaired. Indeed, it grew even closer, for now laughter came into it, and gay bubbling little confidences, and a delightful hour before bedtime, full of eagerness and zest. Mr. Ladd, cigar in mouth, and his keen handsome face as deferential as any courtier's, listened to the interminable doings of Satty and Nelly and Jessie, with an enjoyment that never seemed to tire.

He, too, had his budget of the day, which, often begun whimsically, not seldom ended in a serious exposition of his difficulties and problems. It amused him to state such complexities in simple language; to bring them down, by some homely metaphor, to the comprehension of this adorable little coquette, who tried with so many childish arts to dazzle and ensnare him. Even at thirteen she was learning the value of drawing out a man about himself; she was quite willing to understand the Interstate Commerce Law, and become pink and indignant over a

new classification of "Coal at the pit's mouth"—if it meant her father would hold her a little tighter, and give her one of those sudden glances of approval.

Such intercourse with a shrewd, strong, brilliant mind—to a child naturally precocious and adaptive—could not fail to have far-reaching consequences on her development. She caught something of her father's independence; of his lofty and yet indulgent outlook on a universe made up so largely of fools and knaves; learned the greatest and rarest of all imaginative processes—to put oneself in the other fellow's shoes. When Joe Howard turned traitor at the state legislature, and sold out the K. B. and O. on the new mileage bill, her wrath at his duplicity rose to fever. "Well, there's his side to it," said Mr. Ladd, with unexpected serenity. "He hasn't a cent; he's mortgaged up to the ears; and has a sick daughter dying of consumption. He's a well-meaning man, and I suppose would be honest if he could. But if I were in his place, and your life was at stake, and the doctor ordered you to some ten-dollar-a-minute place in Colorado or somewhere, I guess I'd sell out the K. B. and O. too!"

And for that he got a hug that nearly choked him.

"Money and love, my lamb," he said to her once, "those are the wheels the old wagon runs on. Miss Simpkins will fluff you up with a whole lot of fancy fixings—but I tell you, it boils right down to that."

"Papa," she asked him on another occasion, with round wondering eyes, "if it's all like that, why are you honorable and noble and splendid?"

"I don't know," he answered, smiling. "I guess it's pride more than anything else. Theoretically the man with the fewest scruples gets farthest in the race; but thank the Lord, most of us are handicapped with some good qualities that stick to us like poor relations."

"But Miss Simpkins says that anybody who is bad gets punished for it sooner or later. She says that was why her brother-in-law's house burned down; because he was so uncharitable."

"It may be so with the people Miss Simpkins is acquainted with," said Mr. Ladd, "but it doesn't hold in the railroad business, nor anywhere else that I have seen, and I can't help thinking she's a trifle more hopeful than the traffic can bear!"

This philosophy, so picturesquely expressed, so genial, so amiably cynical, was not perhaps the best training for an unusually impressionable mind. Miss Simpkins learned to dread Phyllis' preface: "But Papa says—" What Papa said was often a bombshell that blew shams to pieces; tore down the pretty pink scenery of conventional illusions; and drove cobble-stones through the gauze that separated Miss Simpkins and her kind from the real world beyond. It was a harsh process, and bad for gauze.

At first, not knowing how else to maintain a fairly large establishment, Mr.

Ladd had sought the services of a "managing housekeeper." But the trouble with her—or rather with them, for he had a succession—was that the "managing" was considerably overdone. They were discharged, the one after the other, without having "managed" to achieve their one consuming ambition, which was to capture the rich widower, and lead him to the altar. After a while, growing weary of being hunted, and altogether at his wits' end, he invited his unmarried sister, Henrietta Ladd, to take the foot of his table, and a place at his hearth.

She was a thin, plain, elderly woman, with a very low voice and a deceptive appearance of meekness. The casual guest at Mr. Ladd's board might have taken her for a silent saint, who, unwillingly sojourning in this vale of tears, was waiting with ladylike impatience for a heavenly crown. In some ways this description would have fitted Aunt Henrietta well enough, though it took no account of a perverse and interfering nature that was more than trying to live with. The silent saint attempted to rule her brother and her niece with a rod of iron, and so far succeeded that her two years "tenure of the gubernatorial chair" (as Mr. Ladd bitterly called it), was fraught with quarrels and unhappiness. Her tyranny, like all tyrannies, ended in a revolution. Mr. Ladd brought his "unmarried misery"—also his own phrase—to a sharp conclusion, and Henrietta departed with a large check and a still larger ill-will.

"Phyllis," he said, "I guess we'll just have to rustle along by our poor little selves. The people who take charge of us seem to take charge too hard. They mean well, but why should they stamp on us?—Yes, let's try it ourselves."

And Phyllis, not quite fifteen years old, became the acknowledged mistress of the big house.

In her demure head she knew that to fail would be to incur a danger that was almost too terrible to contemplate. Her father might be persuaded into marrying again, and the thought of such a catastrophe sobered and restrained her. She was on her mettle, and was determined to succeed. She had her check-book, her desk, her receipted bills. She had her morning interviews with the cook; sent curtains to the cleaners; rang up various tradespeople on the telephone; gently criticized Mary's window-cleaning, and George's nails, and busied herself with these, and innumerable other little cares, while Miss Simpkins waited in the study, restlessly drumming her long, lean fingers on a French grammar.

Of course, she did several foolish, impulsive things, but no more than some little bride might have done in the first novelty of controlling a large household. She gave a tramp one of her father's best suits of clothes; she was prevailed upon by the servants to buy many things that neither they nor anybody else could possibly need—including an electrically driven knife-cleaner, and a cook's table, so compact and ingenious, that it would have been priceless on an airship, though in her own spacious kitchen it was decidedly out of place; and it took her several

months to discover that James was apparently feeding five elephants instead of five horses.

But she was quick to learn better; and with the innate capacity she inherited from her father, she soon had everything running on oiled wheels. And all this, if you please, at fifteen, with quite a bit of stocking between her dress and her trimly-shod feet.

It was seldom that her father ever ventured into the realm of criticism; but once or twice, in his smiling, easy-going way, he gently pulled her up.

"I don't know much about these things," he remarked once, "but don't there seem to be a lot of new dresses in this family?"

"One can't go naked, Papa."

"Admitting that, my dear, which with people of our position would certainly give rise to comment—couldn't we compromise on—well—going *half*-naked, and perhaps show a more Spartan spirit, besides, in regard to our hats?"

Phyllis' eyes filled with tears; and flushing with shame, she pressed her hot cheek against the back of the chair she was sitting in, and felt herself the most miserable, disgraced, unworthy little creature in the whole world.

Mr. Ladd's voice deepened, as it always did when he was moved.

"My darling," he said, "don't feel badly about it, because it is only a trifle. But it is not kind to your companions to dress better than they do, and I am sure you do not wish them to feel envious or resentful. I just ask you to bear it in mind, that's all, and be somewhat on your guard."

"I will, Papa."

"Now come and kiss your daddy, and tell him you're not cross with him for being such an old fuss-cat."

"Y-y-ou are n-not an old fu-u-uss-cat, but the dearest, darlingest, bestest—"

"Do you think it's right to bite a railroad president's ear?"

"Yes, if you love him!"

"Or muss up the only hair he has, which isn't very much?"

"Yes, if it helps you to think."

"What's that—*thinking*?"

"Yes, Papa."

"It worries me, dearest, to have you doing anything as serious as that."

"Papa, it is serious. Listen!"

"I'm listening,"

"I've a wonderful idea—I'm going to give a party!"

"Splendid—hope you'll ask me!"

"And I'm going to invite Satty Morrison, and Julia Grant, and Hetty Van Bu-

ren, and Maisie Smith, and the two Patterson girls, and perhaps Alicia Stewart—and we are going to have ice-cream, and lady’s-fingers, and chocolate-cake, and Christmas crackers, if I can buy them this time of year—and, Papa, it’s going to be a *hat-party*.”

”Oh, a hat-party, goodness me, what’s that?”

”To give away all the silly, extravagant hats I’ve bought—though I’ll have to get two new ones to make them go round—but you won’t mind that, will you?”

”No, indeed—not for a hat-party.”

And next day the invitations were out.

This scandalous way of bringing up an only daughter caused many people to shake their heads.

”It’ll end in a peck of trouble for Mr. Ladd some day,” said the old cats, with which Carthage was as liberally stocked as any other great and flourishing American city. ”Mark my words, my dear, no good can come of bringing up a girl like a wild Indian, and he’ll have nobody to blame but himself if she goes headlong to the bad.”

## CHAPTER II

At twenty, Phyllis Ladd was one of the prettiest girls in Carthage. A little above medium height, slim, dark, and glowing like a rose, she moved with that charming consciousness of beauty that is in itself almost a distinction. The French and Spanish in her mother’s southern blood showed itself in her slender feet and hands, in her grace, her voice, her gentle, gracious, and engaging manners. One could not long talk to her without realizing that behind those sparkling eyes there was a fine and highly-sensitive nature, whimsical, original and intrepid; and to know her well was to perceive that she was one of those women who would love with rare intensity; and whose future, for good or evil, for happiness or disaster, was irretrievably dependent on the heart.

In a dim sort of way she had the consciousness of this herself; her flirtations went no further than to dance with the same partner three or four times in the course of the same evening; and Carthage, which gave its young people a great deal of innocent liberty—and which its young people took with the greediness of children—in time got to consider her, in spite of deceptive appearances, as being cold, proud, and ”exclusive.” Certainly her exclusiveness drew the line at being

kissed by boisterous young men, and though their company pleased and amused her, she refused to single out one of them for any special favor.

"They are all such idiots, Papa," she said plaintively. "Aren't there any real men anywhere—real men that a girl *could* love?"

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Mr. Ladd. "I haven't come across one I'd trust a yellow dog to, let alone my daughter. But, frankly, I'm prejudiced on the young-man question—anybody would be who has to run a railroad with them!"

"Papa," she cried, throwing her arms around his neck, and her mood changing to one of her gayest phantasies, "let's go away together, you and I, and see if we can't find him. The Quest of the Golden Young Man! There must be one somewhere, and we'll look for him in every hidy-hole in the world—in street-cars and banks, and ice-cream places, and cellars, and factories, and mountains, and ships—just you and me, with a little steamer-trunk—and we'll run across him in the unlikeliest spot—and he may be a bandit in a cave, or a wild, roystering cowboy shooting up one of those awful little western towns—but we'll know right off that he's our Golden Young Man—and we'll take him, and put him in a crate, and bring him home in the baggage-car, and poke him with a long sharp stick till he's willing to marry me!"

The Quest of the Golden Young Man! It began sooner than Phyllis could ever have believed possible, and with a companion she would have been the last to dream of. Mr. Ladd had a married sister in Washington, the wife of a highly-placed treasury official. Mrs. Sam Fensham was a very fashionable, energetic, pushing woman, wholly absorbed in the task of pulling competitors off the social ladder, and planting her own faultless French shoes on the empty rung. Brother and sister had about as much in common as you could spread on a dime; but Robert Ladd had all the American's admiration of ability, no matter in what direction it was exercised; and Sally Fensham dearly loved her fraternal relationship to the K. B. and O.

This social strategist had volunteered one of her rare visits to Carthage under the stress of bad financial weather. Brother Bob, who regularly brightened her Christmas with a check in four figures, had some peculiarities of purse and heart that Mrs. Fensham was well acquainted with. You might dash him off a letter, slashed with underlining, and piteous in the extremity of its *cri de coeur*, and get nothing in reply but two pages of humorous typewriting, wanting to know why two people, without children, could not manage to scrape along in Washington on sixteen thousand dollars a year?

But Brother Bob, face to face, was a very different person. If you sat on the arm of his chair, and talked of pa and ma and the old days, and perhaps cried

a little, not altogether insincerely, over faces and things long since vanished—if, indeed, under the spell of that grave, kindly brother, you somehow shed your cares into an infinite tenderness, and forgot everything save that you loved him best of any one on earth—if—but it always happened—you did not need to give another thought, to what, after all, was the real object of your visit.

In a day or two, Brother Bob would say; "Sally, just how many dollars would make you feel eighteen again, and as though you were waiting for Elmer Boyd to take you out sleighing?"

You could answer thirty-seven hundred, and get it as readily as a postage stamp; and with it a look of such honest affection, such a glister in those fine eyes, that your words of thanks stammered a little on your tongue.

Well, here was Aunt Sally again—arm-chair—pa and ma—the old days—check—and in her restless, scheming eyes the birth of a vague idea that grew ever more and more alluring,—nothing else than to take this very pretty niece of hers back to Washington, and enhance the Fensham position by a splendid marriage. She had a vision of balls and dinner-parties, all paid for by her millionaire brother; a showy French limousine; unlimited boxes at the theater and opera; and a powerful nephew-to-be, with a name to hoist the portcullis of many a proud social stronghold, and allow the wife of a highly-placed treasury official to squeeze in. The Motts, the Glendennings, the Pastors, the Van Schaicks—the Port Arthurs of Washington society—Sarah Fensham would assail all of them, holding before her one of their cherished sons, and defying them to shoot. A fascinating prospect indeed, and one not beyond realization, considering the girl's beauty, and her father's money.

On the subject being broached to Brother Bob, it was met with a hostility only comparable to a Polar bear being robbed of its cub. The whole marriage-market business nauseated him, he declared; his daughter should never be set up on the counter to be priced and pawed over; not only would her natural refinement revolt at it, but he inconsistently and with much warmth announced that Carthage was full of splendid young men, the sons of his old associates, amongst whom Phyllis should find her husband when the time came, and a fellow worth fifty of those Washington dudes and dough-heads.

"It's all very well for you to talk," said Sally coldly, "but I should say it was more for Phyllis to decide than for you."

"She wouldn't hear of such a thing," protested Mr. Ladd heatedly. "She is a quiet, home-loving girl, and wouldn't put herself in a show-window for anything on earth."

"My house is not a show-window; and what is there immodest or wrong in her meeting the nicest men in America?"

"Besides, she wouldn't care to leave me."

Angry as she was, there was something in this remark that suddenly touched Sally Fensham. She was hard and aggressive, but her heart was not altogether withered, and under extraordinary circumstances could even be moved.

"My poor Bob," she said, holding the lapels of his coat, and looking up at him; "do you not know that Phyllis may meet a man to-day at dinner, and to-morrow at tea, and the day after drive with him for an hour in the Park—and then what's father or mother or anything in the world if she loves him? Bob, dear, just get it out of your head that you are going to keep Phyllis. When the right man comes you will no more count to her than—than that chair!—Oh, yes, of course, every girl loves her father in a way—but you have only been keeping her heart warm—and once it's set on fire—good-by! And, Bob, dear, listen, is it not common sense to let her see the right kind of young men; to sift them and weigh them a bit? Is it a marriage-market to admit none but those who are presentable and well-bred and come of nice people? Is that a show-window? No, it's giving a girl a chance to choose—the chance I wish to Heaven I'd had. We simply try to get the nicest man there is, and you are more apt to get a prize from a hundred than from six!"

"That applies just as much to Carthage as to Washington."

"Bob, you don't know what you've been risking. Your whole way of living is utterly crazy. Why, anybody—*anybody* could come here, and make love to her, and carry her off under your nose—some awful commercial traveler or cheap pianist with frowzy hair—Oh, Bob, girls are such fools—such crazy, crazy fools!"

"Phyllis isn't."

"Was I?"

"No, I don't think you were."

"But didn't I marry Sam Fensham?"

"I don't see that that—"

Sally laughed; and it was not a pleasant laugh to hear in its self-revelation. Sam was notoriously more successful as a treasury official than as a husband.

"Bob, she has to go to Washington with me, and you must put your hand in your pocket, and do things handsomely."

"Against her will?"

Again Sally laughed, more harshly and cynically than before.

"Just you ask her," she said.

That night Mr. Ladd did so, and saw with a sinking heart the electrifying effect it had on her.

Go! Why, she'd jump out of her shoes to go, and wasn't daddy the dearest, darlingest, adorablest person in the world to propose it! And Aunt Sally's

kindness—wasn't it wonderful! She would meet senators and ambassadors, and dance in the White House with lovely barons and counts, and try out her French on a real Frenchman and see if he could understand it!—A winter in Washington! What could be more exciting, more delirious!

Mr. Ladd affected to share her delight, and manfully concealed his true feelings, which were altogether bitter and sad. But he was a brave old fellow, and knew how to take his disappointments smilingly. Besides, what claim had he to resist the inevitable? What right? What justification? He would have bitten his tongue out before he would have reproached her, or marred, by the slightest word, her overflowing and girlish exuberance. It was only as they kissed each other good night that the pent-up appeal came.

"Don't forget your old dad in the shuffle," he said. "It's—it's going to be very hard for him without you, Phyllis."

Her instant contrition was very sweet to him, very comforting and dear. In fact, he had to struggle pretty desperately to allay the storm of tenderness he evoked.—No, no, he wanted her to go to Washington. It was the right thing to do—the only thing to do. A girl ought to see something of the big world before she married and settled down.—Oh, every girl said that to herself, but you couldn't get away from the fact that they were made for men, and men for them, and a father just held the fort till the Golden Young Man arrived.

How they laughed, with tears in their eyes! How infinitely precious was the love that bound them together! Dad was never to be lost in the shuffle—never, never; and he was to write every day, and she was to write; and if it were a hundred Washingtons she'd come straight back to him if he were lonely, for to her there was only one real Golden Young Man, and that was her darling, darling father.

Yet as Mr. Ladd shut the study door, and returned to his seat beside the lamp, he knew in spite of himself that he had said good-by. His guardianship was over; near, now, was that unknown man, that unknown rival, for whose pleasure he had lavished twenty years of incessant care and devotion. Though Ladd was hardly a believer, the wish came out with the fervency of a prayer: "Oh, my God, let him be worthy of her!"

### CHAPTER III

She did write every day; sometimes the merest snippets, sometimes long, graphic letters, full of the new life and the new people. Her début had been an immense success. Eddie Phelps, a horrid, tallowy, patronizing person, but socially a dictator, had put the stamp of his approval on her, and she had managed to receive it and not burst—which, if Papa only knew it, was a very remarkable feat. But, anyway, she had been hall-marked "sterling," and was enjoying herself furiously. And the young men were so different from Carthage, so much more polished and elegant—and pertinacious. Washington young men simply didn't know what "No" meant, and it was like shoveling snow to get rid of them. But Aunt Sarah was a regular White Wings, and the poor, the detrimental, and the fast—every one, in fact, who wasn't a first-class *parti* with references from his last place—got carted away before he knew what had struck him.

And Aunt Sally! "Why, Papa, we didn't know her at all. She is as young as I am, and twice as eager, and dances her stockings through every other night. Washington is divided between the people who hate her, and the people who love her, and they put a tremendous zip into either end of it. What she really wants is to marry me at the cold end, and strengthen her position as she calls it; and though I say it, who shouldn't, the cold-end young men are coming in fast. When one proposes to me, she calls it a scalp, and looks, oh, so pleased! But if I see any of them working up to that I try to stop him in time, though it's awfully exciting just the same. That's why I've only three scalps to report instead of about eight. Oh, Papa, what fun it is!"

In time her letters began to change, and there were little signs of disillusionment. One was almost a tract on worldliness, in which she talked about Vanity Fair, and dancing on coffins, and the inner hunger of the soul. There were also increasing references to J. Whitlock Pastor, always coupled with "ideals." J. Whitlock Pastor was quite a remarkable young man of thirty, with "a beautiful austerity," and "fine mind." His people were immensely wealthy, and immensely fashionable—even in Carthage there was a sacredness about the name of Pastor—and Phyllis said there was something splendid in his taking up forestry as a life work, and devoting himself to it, heart and soul, when he had been born—not with a silver spoon—but with a bird's-egg diamond in his mouth.

If there was anything to be said against J. Whitlock Pastor, it was that he was almost too good to be true. He wanted to leave the world better for his having been, and all that—and seemed to have what might be called an excruciating sense of duty. "A very quiet and rather a sad man," wrote Phyllis, "whom one might easily mistake for a muff if one hadn't seen him on horseback. He rides superbly, and I never saw a ring-master in a circus who could come anywhere near him."

All this worked up to a telegram that reached Mr. Ladd a few weeks later: "I accepted him last night, and, Papa, please come on quick and bless us."

Mr. Ladd hastened to Washington as speedily as his affairs would allow, which was five days later, and arrived just in time to dress for the introductory dinner at Mrs. Pastor's—J. Whitlock's mother's. He tried to imagine he was delighted, and caught his daughter in his arms with the enthusiasm of a stage parent. But Phyllis was so pale, so calm, so undemonstrative that he hardly knew what to make of her. He put her cool indifference down to Washington training, but still it puzzled and troubled him. It was so unlike a girl who had met her fate—so unlike another pair of lovers that had been so much in his head that day—Genivieve de Levancour, and a certain Bob Ladd. The contrast gave him a certain sense of foreboding.

In the carriage she was very silent, and nestled against him like a tired child. He repeated his congratulations; he strove again to be delighted; joked, not without effort, about the exalted position of the Pastors, and what a come-down it was for them to marry such poor white trash as the Ladds. Then it occurred to him that perhaps this jarred upon her! "Forgive me, Phyllis," he said humbly. "I—I hardly know what I am saying. I—I guess I'm trying to hide what this recalls to me—what this means to me."

She pressed his hand, and snuggled it against her cheek, but still shrouded herself in reserve.

"Papa," she said suddenly, "you'd stick to me through thick and thin, wouldn't you? Whatever I did—however foolish or silly I might be, you'd always love me, wouldn't you?"

"By God, yes," he answered, "though why on earth you should ask—"

"Only to make sure," she exclaimed, brightening. "Just to be certain that my old-dog father hadn't changed. Now say bow-wow, just to show that you haven't!"

Mr. Ladd, very much mystified, and not at all comfortable in his mind, obediently bow-wowed. It set Phyllis off in a peal of laughter, and it was with apparent hilarity that both descended at the Pastor's front door.

Whitlock's mother received them in the drawing-room. She was a stately, gray-haired woman, with a subdued voice, and a graciousness that was almost oppressive. Her guests had hardly been seated, when J. Whitlock himself appeared, and excused himself, with faultless and somewhat unnecessary courtesy, for not having been found awaiting their arrival. Mr. Ladd saw before him a tall, thin young man, of a polished and somewhat cold exterior, with a dryness of expression that was positively parching. Like one of those priceless enamels of the Orient, one felt that J. Whitlock Pastor had been roasted and glazed, roasted and glazed, roasted and glazed until the substance beneath had become but a matter of conjecture. The enamel was magnificent—but where was the man? Mr. Ladd, with a choking sense of disappointment, began to suspect there was none.

J. Whitlock opened the proceedings much as the czar might have opened a Duma. He recited a neat, dry, commonplace little address of welcome, and sounded a key-note of constraint and formality that was rigorously maintained throughout the evening. The address was seconded by the empress-dowager, and then it was Mr. Ladd's turn to swear loyalty to the throne, and burst into cheers. He did so as well as he could, but it was a poor, lame attempt; and when, almost in despair, he went up to J. Whitlock, and impulsively wrung the Imperial hand, the very atmosphere seemed to shiver at the sacrilege.

A frigid dinner followed in a dining-room of overpowering magnificence. There was a high-class conversation to match, interrupted from time to time by a small British army—small in number—but prodigal of inches, and calves, and chest-measure—who stealthily pounced on plates, obtruded thumbs, and stopped breathing when they served you. Mr. Ladd, smarting with an inexplicable resentment, compounded of jealousy, scorn and chagrin, writhed in his chair, and tugged at his mustache, and gazed from his daughter to his prospective son-in-law with melancholy wonder.

Yet Phyllis seemed to be perfectly contented, sitting there so demure, elegant and self-possessed at the terrible board of the Romanoffs. Mr. Ladd could have wished that she had shown a little more assertion, a little more—well, he hardly knew what but something to offset the unconscious arrogance of these people, and to show them that a Ladd was as good as they were, if not a darned sight better! But Phyllis, if anything, was too much the other way. There was a humility in her sweetness, her deference, her touching desire to please. To her father she seemed to have accepted too readily, too gratefully, her beggar-maid position at that kingly table.

But as he watched her some doubts assailed him. He remembered how singular she had been in the carriage, how over-wrought, and unlike her usual self. Her eyes, fixed so constantly on her intended's, had in them more pleading than love; more a curious, studying, seeking look, as though she, too, was trying to penetrate the enamel, and see beneath. But her voice softened as she spoke to him; she smiled and colored at his allusions to "us" and "our"; she shyly referred to their projected honeymoon in the western forests, and spoke rapturously of galloping through the glades at the head of twenty rangers, all sunburned and jingling and armed to the teeth.

What was an old fellow to make of it, anyway? One could bring up a girl from a baby, and still not know her. Mr. Ladd was very much perplexed.

After dinner, the ladies left the two men at their coffee, and retired. The British Army set out liqueurs, cigars, a spirit-lighter, and then noiselessly vanished. Now that they were alone together, Mr. Ladd hoped that J. Whitlock would unbend; hoped that the long-deferred process of making his acquaintance would

begin. He might not be an ideal son-in-law, but it was horse-sense to make the best of him. You had to take the son-in-law God gave you. Besides, the man that Phyllis loved was bound to have a fine nature; and if he could unveil it to her, he surely could unveil it to her father. So, between sips of Benedictine, and through the haze of a good cigar, Mr. Ladd essayed the task.

He commenced by describing his own early manhood; his courtship of Phyllis' mother; his marriage in face of a thousand difficulties. Again and again he faltered; it was all so sacred; his eyes were often moist—but he persevered; he had to win this young man, and how better than by appealing to the sentiment that unites all true lovers? The elderly railroad president could not bear utterly to be left out of these two young lives. His daughter was lost to him; at best a husband leaves little for a father; this stranger had it now in his power to make that little almost nothing. Small wonder, then, that Mr. Ladd struggled for his shred of happiness; put pride on one side; exerted every faculty he possessed to attract the friendship of Phyllis' master. For a husband is a master; a woman is the slave of the man she loves; forty centuries have changed nothing but the words, and the size and metal of the ring.

It used to be of iron, and was worn on the neck.

Mr. Ladd's gaze, that had been fixed in vacancy, of a sudden fell full on J. Whitlock's face. What he saw was an expression so cold, so delicately supercilious, so patiently polite, that he stopped as suddenly as though he had been struck by lightning. Was it for this, then, that he had opened this holy of holies, into which no human being before had ever looked,—this inmost recess of his soul, now profaned, it seemed to him, for ever? For a second his shame transcended even his disappointment. He had dishonored the dead, besides dishonoring himself. He had allowed this tall, thin, bored creature to hear things too dear, too intimate, to be spoken even to Phyllis. My God, what an old fool he had been, what an ass!

"Had we not better join the ladies?" inquired J. Whitlock, after the pause had lasted long enough to redeem the proposal from any appearance of rudeness.

"I suppose we had," returned Mr. Ladd, in a tone as dry as his host's; and together they both sought the drawing-room.

A long, long hour followed before, in decency, a very flustered, embittered, and upset middle-aged gentleman could dare to say his adieu. From the frescoed ceiling the painted angels must certainly have wept at the sight beneath; or, if they did not weep, they surely yawned. The labored conversation, the make-believe cordiality, the awful gap when a topic fell to rise no more, certainly made it an evening that never could be forgotten. Blessed Briton who said: "Mr. Ladd's kerridge!" Twice blessed Briton who handed them into it, and uttered the magic word "Ome!"

"Did you like him, Papa?"

"A delightful young man, Phyllis, perfectly delightful."

"And his mother?"

"Charming, charming!"

"I never saw either one of them unbend as they did to you."

"It was a great compliment. I appreciate it."

"You don't think I could have done better?"

"No, indeed. Not if you love him."

"Papa?"

"Yes, dearest?"

"Papa, I've done something awful. Shut your eyes, and I'll try to tell you."

"Phyllis, what do you-?"

"Are they shut-tight-tight?"

"Yes, but I don't--"

"Now, don't talk, Papa, but listen like a good little railroad president, and I'll tell you what I think of J. Whitlock Pastor, and that is he's *unbearable*! No, no, I'm not joking—I mean it, I mean it! He's unbearable, and his mother's unbearable, and the forty yards around them is unbearable, and I wouldn't marry him for anything under the sun, no, not if he was the only man in the world except the clergyman who would do it; and Papa, I'm so mortified and ashamed and miserable that I don't know what to do. Didn't you notice me to-night, and how shy and crushed I was, sitting there like a little Judas, and feeling, oh, horribly wicked and treacherous? It was *all* I could do not to scream out that I hated him, just as loud as I could: I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!—I was trying to tell you that when we started, but I didn't have the courage. I wanted you to see him for yourself; to realize how unendurable he is; I—I-wanted you not to blame me too much, Papa."

To Mr. Ladd it was like a reprieve at the gallows' foot. Blame her? Why, elation ran to his head like wine; he caught her in his arms and hugged her; had he saved her from drowning he could not have been more passionately thankful. His opinion of the young man came out in a torrent of unvarnished Anglo-Saxon. To every epithet he applied to him, Phyllis added a worse. In their wild humor, and bubbling over with a laughter that verged on the hysterical, they vied with each other in tearing J. Whitlock to pieces.

"But, Phyllis, Phyllis, how did you ever come to do it?"

"I don't know, Papa."

"But you must have liked him?"

"I thought I did."

"Was it the attraction of his position—his name—and all that kind of thing?"

"No, I thought I loved him."

"How *could* you have thought such a thing?"

"It's incredible, but I did, Papa. I loved him right up to the moment when he kissed me. And how could I stop him after having looked down at my toes, and said 'Yes.' He's been kissing me for five days—and, Papa, I hate him."

The fierceness she put into these three words was vitriolic. Disgust, revulsion, outraged pride flooded her cheek with carmine.

"Papa, I can't make any excuses for myself. It's not prudery; it's not that; but somehow the real *me* didn't like the real *him*, and that's all I can say about it!"

"You'll have to write to him, and break it off."

"But what am I to tell him, Papa? It's so awful and humiliating for him. I guess I'll just put it down to insanity in my family."

"But, good Lord, we haven't any—we've a very decent record."

"Oh, Papa, I simply must have been insane to have got engaged to him.—I'll write him a beautiful letter of regret, and inclose a doctor's certificate!"

Her incorrigible humor was again asserting itself. She outlined the letter, her eyes dancing with merriment. Mr. Ladd, in no mood to criticize these swift transitions, joined in whole-heartedly. They laughed and laughed till the tears came, and arrived home like noisy children from a party.

Mrs. Fensham, in a very décolleté gown, and looking like a sylph of twenty-five, was waiting for the carriage to take her to a ball. She swam up in front of Bob, and raised her two little hands to his shoulders—a graceful gesture, and one she was very fond of.

"And you found him a perfect dear, didn't you?" she murmured ecstatically.

"Well, I don't know that I did," faltered Brother Bob, placing a kiss on the top of her head. "The fact is, Sally, we've decided to call it off!"

"Bob, you haven't broken the engagement!"

Her lisping voice turned suddenly metallic. She stared from her brother to her niece, a sylph no longer, but a woman of forty-five, pale with apprehension and anger.

"Phyllis has made a mistake, that's all," he said. "He looked very nice in the show-window, but now we are going to take him back, and get a credit-slip for something we want more."

"A new automobile coat for Papa," put in Phyllis mischievously.

"And you can both laugh about it!" exclaimed Aunt Sarah in appalled accents. "Laugh at throwing over J. Whitlock Pastor! Oh, you little Carthage nobodies—haven't you any sense at all—don't you know what you are doing—isn't he as much a duke with us as any Marlborough or Newcastle in England? He was too good; he was too nice; he wasn't enough of a snob to blow and brag—and that's what he gets for it, the 'No' of a silly girl, who'd prefer a barber's block

clerk to the greatest gentleman in America!"

She tottered to the mantelpiece and burst into tears—the first tears she had shed in twenty worldly and scheming years—and the only tears that did attend the rupture of the Pastor-Ladd engagement.

## CHAPTER IV

There was the usual chatter, the usual slanders, the usual innuendoes that follow such an event. Charming little assassins, in Paquin gowns and picture hats flew about sticking pins into Phyllis' reputation. Those worse gossips, the clubs, were not behindhand either; and old gentlemen, who ought to have known better, unctuously laid their heads together and passed the lies along. It is so much the custom to dwell on the good side of human nature that we are apt to forget the existence of another—that cruel malignancy, which, in embryo, may be seen any time at the monkey-house in the Zoo. In its more developed human form it jostles at our elbows every day.

The American duke himself behaved with a beautiful propriety. Publicly he took all the blame on his own shoulders, and hied him to the western wilds to scourge the campers and cigarette-smokers who infested his beloved forests. Thus congenially employed, he was quite willing to wait for Time's healing hand to do the rest. In a year he was completely reënamed, and took a finer polish than ever.

Mr. Ladd hoped that Phyllis would return to Carthage to hide her head from the storm. But she insisted on staying in Washington, and "seeing it through," which she did with the prettiest defiance imaginable, returning pin for pin with gay insouciance, and dancing the night out in all manner of lions' dens. In her veins there ran the blood of that old aristocratic South—of those fighting-cock Frenchmen, dark, lithe and graceful, who had loved, gambled and gone the pace with headlong recklessness and folly; of those fiery Spaniards, more grave and still more dissolute, to whom pride was the very breath of life, and who could call out a man and shoot him with the stateliest of courtesies.—What a race it had been in the heyday of its wildness and youth, the torment of women, the terror of men, alluring even now through the haze of by-gone pistol-smoke! And though it has been dead and gone these hundred and fifty years, the strain yet persists in some Phyllis here, some stripling there, attenuated perhaps, but far, far from

lost.

Even to-day such intrepidity casts its spell. The eyes that are unafraid, the mouth that can smile in peril, do we not still admire their possessor—and that most of all in a young, high-bred and exceedingly attractive woman? Washington certainly did in Phyllis Ladd—young-man Washington, that is,—and they trooped after her in cohorts, and would have drunk champagne from her little slipper had she let them.

Months rolled by. The tide of Phyllis' letters rose in Mr. Ladd's drawer—countless pages in that fine girlish hand, full of zest, full of the joy of living, revealing, intimate, and silent only in regard to the most important matter of all—J. Whitlock's successor.

Mr. Ladd knew what value to set on her assertion that she was "tired of men." He waited, not without jealousy, for preference to show itself; reading and re-reading every allusion that might afford a clue. If she wrote that "the ambassador was a very kind old man, with aristocratic legs, and a profile like a horse, who singled me out for much more than my share of attention"—Mr. Ladd would forthwith look up that ambassador; get his diplomatic rating; and worry about his being sixty-six, and twice a widower.

One day, quite out of the sky, a card was brought him inscribed, "Captain Baron Sempft von Piller, First Attaché, Imperial German Embassy, Washington." As a rule, applicants to see Mr. Ladd had first to state their business, and undergo a certain amount of sifting before they were admitted. In this manner inventors were weeded out, cranks, people with a grievance against the claims' department, book-agents, labor-leaders, charity-mongers, bogus clergymen who had been refused half-rates—all that host who buzzed like mosquitoes outside Mr. Ladd's net. But the First Attaché of the Imperial German Embassy was given an open track, which he took with a military stride, and the clank of an invisible sword.

Mr. Ladd turned in his chair, and beheld a florid, tall, fine-looking young man of twenty-eight or so, with the stiff carriage of a Prussian officer, and unshrinking blue eyes that had been trained not to droop in the face of anything.

The captain wasted no time in preliminaries. In a carefully-rehearsed sentence, innocent of all punctuation, and delivered in a breath, he said: "It is not my intention to trespass overlong on the time of I know a much-engrossed gentleman but if you will kindly grant me three minutes I shall be happy to convince you of the integrity of my character and the honor of my intentions Mr. Ladd Sir."

Taking another breath that swelled out his magnificent chest at least four inches, he resumed: "This I now lay before you is my birth-certificate these are

the reports on my gymnasium courses at Pootledam respectively marked good very good indifferent good very good till inspired by the thought of a military career I entered on probation subsequently made permanent by the vote of my fellow-officers the tenth regiment of Uhlans which after six years of honorable commendation I left regretted by every one to place myself in the diplomatic service Mr. Ladd Sir."

Taking a third breath, he went on:

"By kindly glancing at this letter which I have the honor to bear from my esteemed chief whom I am proud also to call my friend you will see to your complete satisfaction that I am no needy adventurer trading on an historic and greatly-renowned name but a man of substance promise and ability with the assurance of reaching if I live the highest place it is in the power of my country and my emperor to grant Mr. Ladd Sir."

He was inhaling his fourth breath when Mr. Ladd managed to interpose a speech of his own.

"I am delighted to see you, captain," he said, "and I shall be happy to oblige you in any way I can. Perhaps you desire to inspect what is really one of the most perfect double-track railroad systems in this country, operated at the minimum of expense, and with an efficiency that makes the K. B. and O. very favorably regarded by our public. If it falls below the high standard of your own government-owned lines, you must credit us with a traffic at least sixteen-fold larger per mile than that of yours. I will ask you to bear this in mind before making too critical a comparison."

A boyish and most engaging smile overspread the captain's features, and for the moment he almost forgot how to go on with the set speech he had learned so carefully. But he stiffened his shoulders, threw back his head, and continued, like a student up for a difficult and trying examination: "Before paying my addresses to one whose youth beauty and charm has taken captive a heart hitherto untouched by the sentiment of love I judged it only right as a gentleman and a former German officer before seeking to compromise the lady's inclination in any way whatever to provide myself with the necessary proofs of my unassailable position and honor and lay them with profound respect in the hands of her highly-considered and greatly-esteemed father Mr. Ladd Sir."

Mr. Ladd nearly fell off his chair at this announcement; but controlling himself, he bent hastily over the papers, and managed to hide his stupefaction. He was very much bewildered, and though favorably impressed by Von Piller, had the American's distrust of all foreigners, particularly if titled. The word "baron" conjured up horrible stories of imposture and mortification; hungry fortune-hunters; shameless masqueraders preying on credulity and snobbishness, always with debts at home and often wives; old-world wolves ravening for the trusting

lambs of the new.

But the ambassador's letter was most explicit, and its authenticity could be tested in an hour. The craftiest of wolves would not dare to take such a risk. Wonder of wonders, it seemed, too, that the baron was rich—one of the Westphalian iron kings—with great landed estates besides. Yes, he was certainly a very eligible young man. No harm could be done by rising and shaking hands with him. Mr. Ladd did so, impressively.

"You are very punctilious," he said. "I wish we had more of that ourselves. Your conduct is manly and straightforward, and I esteem it highly. Frankly, I should prefer my daughter to marry an American—but if a foreigner is to win her, I should be very happy to have that foreigner you."

The baron, who was now quite out of set-speeches, and had to flounder in English of his own making, murmured: "I lofe her—oh, how I lofe her! My friends they say, 'crazy, crazy,' but I say, 'no, this tells me I am wise.'"

And with that he pressed his hand to his heart, with an air of such simplicity and devotion that Mr. Ladd was touched.

"You're a fine young man," he said, "and I wish you luck."

"You will speak well of me to her?—Manly, straightforward—you will say those words?"

"With pleasure, Baron."

The florid face beamed; the blue eyes were shining; Mr. Ladd remembered the tendency of foreigners to embrace, and hastened to put the desk between them.

"I will go now," exclaimed Von Piller. "I will what you call, get busy. I will lay at her little feet the heart of a man that adores her!"

"Don't be in too big a hurry," said the railroad president kindly. "Take an old fellow's advice; begin by trying to make a good impression."

Von Piller smiled complacently.

"Already have I done it," he remarked. "She likes me very mooch. The battle is half-won, and all I need is General Papa to reinforce."

It suddenly shot through General Papa's mind that the baron was not so simple as he appeared. Mr. Ladd's first feeling of compassion for a hopeless suit changed to a grinding jealousy. It was intolerable to him that anybody should carry off his precious daughter, and this amiable young man at once took on the hue of an enemy. Their farewell was stiff and formal; and when, two hours later, the confirming telegram arrived from the German embassy, Mr. Ladd hotly

consigned Captain Baron Sempft von Piller to the devil.

## CHAPTER V

Von Piller had not under-estimated the "good impression." It was certainly good enough for him to become, two days later, the successful suitor for Phyllis' hand. The engagement was in the papers, and everybody was happy—save Mr. Ladd. On top of his natural resentment at any poor human biped in trousers daring to aspire to his daughter, there were two letters from Washington that embittered him beyond measure. The one was from Phyllis; the other from Sarah Fensham; and though very different in expression their gist was the same. He was besought *not* to come to Washington.

"Dear, darling old daddy," wrote Phyllis, "The whole thing is such gossamer, so faint and delicate and eider-downish, that one belittling look of yours, one unguarded and critical word—would utterly destroy it. Of course, Sempft is not the Golden Young Man, and I know it very well, but I really do like him lots, and if you will give it six weeks to 'set,' as masons say, I believe that it will turn very nicely into love. But just now—! Oh, Papa, the poor little building would topple so easily—and you know how hard I have found it already to stay too close to those big, greedy, grasping creatures who want to race off with one as a poodle does with a stick. Not that Sempft isn't awfully nice and considerate, but I know there will be times when—! Oh, Papa, be patient, and give me a chance, for if you should hurry over and catch me in the right humor, I would send him away so fast that he would think he was fired out of a Zalinski cannon!"

Sarah's letter was in a more wounding strain: "For Heaven's sake, stay away, my dearest brother, or you will ruin everything. That girl of yours is too fastidious and wilful for belief, and from the bottom of my heart I am sorry for the poor dear baron, who is making such a goddess out of an icicle. She is possessed of the same insane pride that you have, and is quite of your own opinion that nobody is good enough for her. After bringing her up all wrong, don't add to your folly by breaking off a second splendid match. Stay in Carthage, and try to acquiesce in the fact that sooner or later she is bound to marry somebody; and thank your stars that it is somebody to be proud of. I know she is too good for any one but an archangel, but still, steel yourself to accept a young, wealthy, handsome, brilliant, accomplished, high-born and distinguished son-in-law, who

has the world at his feet. Naturally to you it is an intolerable prospect. I don't ask you to say that it is not. But for Heaven's sake, remain in Carthage, and keep your sulks at a distance."

After his first anger had passed, Mr. Ladd took himself seriously to task, and forced that other self of his to admit the undeniable justice of both these letters. He was a cantankerous, cross-grained old curmudgeon, and the right place for a cantankerous, cross-grained old curmudgeon was unquestionably—Carthage. If he were so utterly unable to make allowances for youth and immaturity—and he had to assent to the fact that he was unable—he ought, at any rate, to have the grace to keep his fault-finding face turned to the wall. Phyllis was right. Sarah was right. Everybody was right, except a hot-headed old fellow, with a sick and jealous heart, who, if he did not restrain himself, would end by marring his daughter's future beyond recall.—Yes, he would hold himself in; he would do nothing to incur reproach; he would let things take their course, and pretend to be a sort of Sunny Jim, smilingly regarding events from Carthage.

It was none too easy an undertaking, but he was sustained in some degree by the hurried little scrawls that reached him, day by day, from Phyllis.—It was all going splendidly. She was so proud of Sempft. He was everywhere such a favorite. He was so high-spirited, and manly—and so crazily in love with her. It was nice to have him so crazily in love with her. It was nice to lead such a big, swaggering soldier by a pink ribbon—to pin him with a little, girlish ticket marked "reserved"—to see him jump at the mere raising of an eyebrow when some embezzling young *débutante* had sneaked him away into a corner.—Then there was the engagement ring she could not pull her glove over, with diamonds so large and flashing that they'd light the gas; there was the gorgeous pearl-necklace, which Aunt Sarah would not allow her to accept yet; there was the emperor's wonderful cablegram of congratulation, all about Germany and America, as though the two countries were engaged, instead of merely she and Sempft. It made her feel so important, so international—and horrid, shabby men snap-shotted her on the street like a celebrity, walking backwards with cameras in their hands while everybody fell over everybody to see what was going on!—Oh, yes, Papa, she was saving it up to brag about to her grandchildren—when she was a tiresome old lady in a castle corner, with nothing to do but bore chubby little German aristocrats.

Her gaiety and sprightliness never wavered. Her content, her happiness were transparent. If her ardor for Baron von Piller seemed never to pass the big-brother limits, it might be assumed she concealed her feelings, and was either too shy or too modest to betray them. Mr. Ladd, who read her letters with a microscope, noticed the omission, and—wondered. His misgivings were not untinged with pleasure. Did she really love this man, he asked himself again and again? It was impossible to be certain. Had it not been for the J. Whitlock Pastor

episode he would have been in less doubt. But with this in mind, he could not help wondering—wondering a great deal.

The answer to these conjectures came with a startling unexpectedness. One afternoon, on his return home, he found the front door open, and an expressman staggering up to it with a trunk. In the hall were five more trunks, and Henry and Edwards, both in shirt-sleeves, were departing for the upper regions with another. Before Mr. Ladd could ask a question there was a swift rush of skirts, an inroad of barking dogs, and a radiant young person was hanging to his neck with round, bare arms. It was Phyllis, her eyes dancing, her face flushed with the romp she had been having with the dogs, her hair in wild disorder, and half down her back.

"I'm home, Papa," she cried, "home for good, and in such awful disgrace you oughtn't to take me in! Yes, your wayward girl has crept back to the dear old farm, and though the snow was deep, and all she had was a crust from a crippled child—she's here, Papa, at last, and, oh, oh, oh, so glad!—Down, Watch, down! Teddy, you'll get one in the nose if you don't stop!—Oh, the little wretch has got my slipper off!"

Teddy scampered away with it, and there was a lively tussle before it was recovered, with all manner of laughter and slaps and growls.

"But Captain von Piller?" demanded Mr. Ladd. "Is he coming? Is he here, too?"

"No, Papa," she returned, "he isn't here, and he never will be here, and I left him screaming till you could hear it all over Washington. Just howling, Papa, and calling for warships! And Aunt Sarah was hollering, too, till the only dignified thing left was to tie my sheets together and let myself out, which I did before there was a riot!"

"Phyllis, you don't mean that your engagement—"

"Hush, Papa, we can't talk here.—Come upstairs to your den."

There she heaped up a dozen pillows on the divan; settled herself with Watch's head on her lap, and Wally and Teddy beside her; asked if there were any chocolate creams, and resigned herself to there being none; and then, pushing back the soft, thick hair from her eyes, told her father to sit at her feet, and not to crowd a valuable dog.

"Yes, all that's finished," she said. "It was splendid and international, and all that, but I could not stand it any more. He was just like poor Whitlock, only worse. I don't know how to describe it, Papa, for he was awfully correct and all that—I wouldn't for worlds have you think he wasn't—only he expected all the conventional things that go with being engaged, and wanted me to nestle against his waistcoat, and, and—pant with joy I suppose—and whisper what a beautiful, wonderful, irresistible, bubble-bubble-bubble person he was—and shyly kiss his

hand, probably—Oh, well, Papa, I tried to, and I didn't like it, and in spite of myself it seemed wrong and humiliating—and he was so large, and pink, and German, and so much of him rolled over his collar, and everybody seemed in such a conspiracy to poke us into dark corners and leave us there, and so finally I just said, 'No, I've made a mistake, and here's your ring, and here's the cablegram from the Kaiser, and here's the photograph of your dead mother—and would you mind getting out of my life, please?—and friends are requested to accept this the only intimation.'

"And how did he take it?"

"He wouldn't take it—that was the trouble. He made a frightful fuss. He couldn't have made more if we had been really married, and I had announced my intention of running away with the elevator-boy! He scrunched my hands till I thought the bones would break, and might have thrown me out of the window if tea hadn't come in the nick of time. Then he went off to Aunt Sarah, with the German idea of stinging up the family—as though twenty aunts could make me love a man I didn't—and succeeded so well that she practically drove me out. Oh, her position! I never heard the end of it—and of course she said I had ruined it, and that she never could hold up her head again. The only thing to do was to run. So I ran and ran and ran—to my old dad!"

She slipped her hand down, and held her father's collar as though he, too, were a dog, and gave it an affectionate little tug.

"My darling old dad," she murmured.

"It's not so bad to have one, is it?" he said. "To know where there is a snug harbor, and an old fellow who thinks you are perfect, and everything you do is right. You will get a lot of criticism for this, and I suppose Washington will boil over—but to my thinking, you couldn't have done better, and I am thankful for your courage. If you don't love a man, for God's sake, don't marry him, even if you're both walking up the aisle, and he's twiddling the ring!—To tell the truth, I wasn't a bit partial to Von Piller, and found it pretty hard to sit tight, and be told he was forty different kinds of a paragon."

"My darling Papa," she observed sweetly, "you're never going to like anybody who wants to marry me, and it's sure to cost me some worry when the right person does come.—Do you suppose he ever will?"

"Oh, I guess so."

"In spite of the awful record I have made? Aunt Sarah says I am branded as a coquette, and no decent man will ever have anything more to do with me."

"Rubbish."

Phyllis fondled Watch's ears, which were long and silky, and tried the effect on dog-beauty of overlapping them on his head.

"Papa, what's the matter with me? Why haven't I any sense? Why am I

not like other girls?"

"You are very fastidious."

"Yes, that's true."

"And very proud."

"Yes, inherited."

"And demand a great deal."

"Yes—everything."

"You are in love with love—and are rather in a hurry."

"Oh, Papa—shut your eyes—I am love-hungry. I want to love—I'm crazy to love. Only—only—"

"The right man hasn't arrived?"

"I hope it's that. If it isn't, I'm going to have a bad time of it. It seems so useless; this getting engaged and then hating the poor wretch.—It's such a terrible waste of energy and heart-beats all round."

"Dad included."

"What a nuisance I am, to be sure! I've exhausted everybody's patience except yours, and that's getting thin. It will end in my living alone in a shanty with nothing but dogs, and the faded photographs of the men I've thrown over. Aunt Sarah called me an awful name; called me an engagement-buster; said that the habit would grow and grow till I was a horrid old maid with nothing to tease but a parrot.—Though I'd love to have a parrot—two of them—and raise little parrots! Little fluffy baby parrots must be adorable. Papa, let's buy a pair to-morrow, and you'll teach the he-one to swear, and I'll teach the she-one to be gentle and submissive and always have her own way. And Papa—?"

"Yes, dearest?"

"You aren't cross with me, are you?"

"Not a bit."

"And I may live with you, and add up your bills, and bring you your slippers, and dream all day of that Golden Young Man who doesn't exist?"

"Oh, don't say that—He does, Phyllis."

"Papa, he doesn't, he doesn't, he doesn't!"

## CHAPTER VI

Socially speaking Carthage was as distant from Washington as is Timbuctoo.

While the Von Piller hurricane was raging in the nation's capital, the Carthage barometer showed "fair and rising." To a storm-tossed little mariner, it was like gaining the lee of some palmy isle, and casting anchor in still water. The islanders, too, if a trifle homespun and provincial, were the most delightful people, and unspoiled by any intrusion of a higher civilization. Phyllis had not realized how entirely her outlook had changed until she returned to her own home. She saw her former school fellows with new eyes, and while she could not forbear smiling at some of their ways, she liked them better than ever before.—They, on their side, regarded with awe this fashionable young beauty, who had jilted a Pastor, and given the mitten to a real, live, guaranteed baron, and who had descended in their midst, like a racer in a paddock of donkeys.

Some of them felt very donkeyfied indeed. Tom Fergus, a gelatinous young man, somewhat forward and familiar, who was alluded to in the local papers as "one of the leaders of the younger set" said she was "raving pretty, but, my stars, what was a fellow to talk to her about?" Billy Phillpots, who worked in his father's store (many of the young fellows "worked in his father's store") vetoed her as "insufferably stuck up," he having escorted her home one night, and failed to extort the usual toll at the garden-gate.—The good night kiss at the garden-gate was quite a Carthage institution, and as innocent as the kiss of an early Christian.

Life in Carthage was altogether Early Christian—for the young people of the better families. They met every night, and moved in flocks, like sparrows, alighting first in one house and then another—taking up the carpets for dancing, improvising suppers, crowding round the fireplaces to sing, and tell stories. Presumably there was some social line drawn somewhere; but money at least counted for little, and anybody that was "nice" was allowed in. And it must be said, on the whole, that they were remarkably "nice," and very much a credit to high-class democracy. The boys were well-mannered, brotherly and respectful; the girls charming in their blitheness and gaiety. Occasionally there was a match, and a couple disappeared as completely as though they had fallen into the river and been swept away. You couldn't marry, and still be a sparrow. No, indeed! You passed into another world, and six months after the sparrows would hardly know you on the street. One would not venture to say this was cruel—though it always came as a shock to the newly-wedded pair—it was just the sparrow way, that's all.

Phyllis was soon flying with the rest of them, and her ready adaptability caused her to be accepted in their midst without more than a passing hesitation. Hiding her riper and more womanly nature, and absorbing herself in this animated triviality, she pretended to be as much a sparrow as any of the flock, and no less lively and empty-headed. She was lonely, heart-tired, and very much adrift on the sea of life; and in the engaging childishness of these girls and boys,

who, though of her own age, were mentally only up to her elbow, she found a sort of solace, a sort of peace. They kept her from thinking; their chatter and good spirits were exhilarating; the naïve admiration of the young men warmed, and yet did not disturb her.—Before her long flight to other skies, the little bird might well be thankful for the sparrows.

Spring came—summer. Her twenty-first birthday passed in the Adirondacks, where her father had a cottage in that wilderness of woods and lakes. She was in her twenty-second year now, and knew what it was to feel old—oh, so old! That she was able, by the laws of the land, to buy and hold real-estate seemed but a poor set-off to this encroachment of time—though her father repeatedly pointed out this new privilege the years had brought. She could marry, too, without his consent—another empty concession to maturity, considering there was no one to marry with or without it. Of course, there were a few silly babies running after her as though she were a woolly sheep—but no one that the wildest stretch of imagination could consider a man. Some of their fathers ran, too—stout widowers panting with the unaccustomed exertion,—but that was grotesque and disgusting. Far or wide, high or low, there wasn't a pin feather of the Golden Young Man. His noble race was extinct. He lived in books, but you never met him. Never, never. He had died out a million years ago, leaving nothing save a tradition for poets and novelists to paw over.

Quite convinced that it was a wretched world, Phyllis danced and rode, picnicked and camped out after deer in a bewitching Wild West costume, and was always the first to a party, and the last to leave it—all very much like one who found it tolerable enough. Some would have called her an insatiable little pleasure-seeker, and been wholly misled. "What are any of us doing except waiting for a man?" she once announced with shocking candor. "It's the fashion to talk of 'other interests' and we girls are all graduating, and slumming, and teaching little foreign Jews to sing '*My Country 'Tis of Thee*, and *Columbia, Gem of the Ocean*, and learning to be trained nurses and bacteriologists—just in the effort to save our poor little self-respect. We ruin our complexions, dim our eyes, and spoil our nice hands—all the property of some future lord and master, whom we really are pilfering—and who's deceived? Who takes it seriously? We don't, who do it. Poof, what a pretense it is!—If you have to wait, why not two-step through it as I do, and be as happy as you can, like people snowed up in a train. That's what a young girl is—snowed up—and I only wish some one would come with a spade and dig me out!"

These racy confidences entertained and delighted her father, but on other people they often had a contrary effect. The truth from the lips of babes and sucklings, however phenomenal, is also disconcerting. Old women, who in private taught their daughters a revolting cynicism, and called it "putting them on

their guard," were much overcome by Phyllis' frankness. It was "bold"; it was "unladylike"; it was "dreadful." They tore Phyllis to pieces, and prophesied the most awful things. It may be that they were right. Selfishness is a fine ballast, and an anxious regard for number one keeps many a little ship on an undeviating course. Phyllis was made to smart for her unconventional sayings, and they often came back to her, so distorted and coarsened by their travels, that her cheeks flushed with anger.

"There's one thing I am learning fast," she said, "and that is, all my friends seem to be men, and all my enemies, women—and I may as well get used to it now. I know there are a few exceptions either way, but it's substantially that, anyhow, and one might as well face up to it, and save trouble."

"I'm afraid you are what they call a man's woman, my dear," said Mr. Ladd.

"I'm glad of it," exclaimed Phyllis saucily. "I don't want to be any other kind of a woman, least of all one of those sneaking, cowardly, backbiting, hypocritical things. I don't wonder they used to whip them in the good old days. If men hadn't degenerated so terribly, they'd be whipping them now!"

Autumn saw her back in Carthage again. Aunt Sarah was begging to have her for another Washington winter, and was in a beautifully forgiving humor. The breaches in her social position had been repaired, and the Demon Want, confound him, was knocking loudly at the door of her elegant establishment—so that the hope of another visit, with its accompanying shower of Brother Bob's gold, loomed very attractively before these cold, blue eyes. But Phyllis could not be beguiled; she had no wish to repeat that mad winter; her mood was all the other way—for her big tranquil house, her books, her dogs, her horses, and long dreaming hours to herself, undisturbed. She had loved Washington, and had exhausted it. The strain of its business-like gaiety was not to be endured again. It was a factory of pleasure, and the hours over-long, the tasks over-hard. Aunt Sarah might ring the bell all she wished, but the factory that winter would be one toiler short. When a person has entered her twenty-second year, that advanced age brings with it a certain serenity unknown to wilder twenty. You are glad to lie back with a dog's head in your lap, and lazily watch the procession. Silly young men, choking in immense collars, no longer can keep you out of bed till three A.M. Let the new débutantes have that doubtful joy. Twenty-two preferred her book, and her silent rooms.—Not that Carthage was without its simple relaxations, but they were well spaced out, with long intervals between.

"Miss Daisy wants you on the 'phone, Miss."

"Oh, all right—I'm coming.—Hello, hello, hello—What a dear you are to ask me—A—matinée Wednesday? Love to!—What's it to be?"

"Oh, Phyllis, you won't be offended, will you, but I'm so poor, and their boxes are only five dollars, and will hold six, and they've promised to squeeze in three more chairs—and so I've invited nine—and it's in that cheap, horrid Thalia Theater, but nobody can hurt us in a box, and everybody says the play's wonderful, and you can eat peanuts, which you can't do in a real theater; and it's *Moths*, by Ouida, and Cyril Adair is the star, and he is so wonderfully handsome—oh, you must have seen his pictures in the barber-shop windows—and anyway, even if he isn't, the play is delightfully wicked—because I had such a fight with mama about it, and then Howard has been twice, which he wouldn't have done if it wasn't; and even if it isn't, how am I to give a theater-party on no more than five dollars? The Columbia boxes are fifteen, and so are the Lyceum's, and when they say six, it's six, and you simply couldn't dare to ask nine girls because they wouldn't let them in. But the Thalia man was so pleased and impressed that I believe he would have included ice-cream if I had asked him—and Phyllis?"

"Yes, darling."

"It would give such a lot of ginger to it, if you would lend me your carriage and the dog-cart—! Oh, I knew you would! What a comfort you are, Phyllis. I don't know how I'd get along without you, you are always so generous and obliging. Nettie Havens has volunteered tea at her house—just insisted on it when I told her. I guess that poor little five never went so far in all its little history! I can't think it ever ran a whole theater-party before, with carriages and teas. It's an awful tacky way of doing things, I admit, but what does it matter if we have a good time?—Yes, that's the only way to look at it, and you're a darling. Do you know I think Harry Thayre is sweet on—! Oh, bother, she says I've to ring off, or pay another nickel. If it was a man she'd let him have fifteen cents' worth! Well, good-by, good-by—!"

It was a pretty sight they presented in their box, a veritable flower-bed of young American womanhood. The bright, girlish faces, the laughter, the animation, the sparkling eyes, the ripples of merriment, the air of innocent bravado—all were in such contrast to the usual patrons of the Thalia that the house could not take its eyes off them. It was essentially a shop-girl-and-best-young-man theater, with a hoodlum gallery, and a general appearance of extreme youth. Those who did not chew gum were almost conspicuous, and a formidable young man with a voice of brass, perambulated the aisles with a large tray, and terrorized nickels and dimes from the pockets of swains. He had a humorous directness that made the price of immunity seem cheap at the money. It was worth a dime any time to escape

him.

And the play?

It was a rousing love-story, crude, stilted, old-fashioned, but developed with a force and earnestness that Ouida has always possessed. The brutal Prince, the ill-used Princess, Corrèze, the idol of the public, the tenor whose voice has taken the world by storm, heart-broken and noble in his hopeless love—here were full-blooded situations to make the heart beat. And how nine of them *did* beat in that crowded box. And what scalding tears rolled down those youthful cheeks! And what little fists clenched as the Prince, passing all bounds, and incensed to frenzy, struck—positively struck—the adorable being who was clinging so desperately to honor and duty! Who could blame Corrèze for what was to follow? Assuredly not our nine rosebuds, who, if anything, found the splendid creature almost too backward, too self-sacrificing. But—!

And Cyril Adair, who played Corrèze with a fervid pathos that tore the heart out of your breast! Of course, you knew he had taken the world by storm. Of course you knew the public idolized him. Wasn't he the handsomest, manliest, most chivalrous fellow alive? Hadn't he a voice to melt a stone, or drive, as cutting as a rapier, through even a Prince? His firm chin, his faultless teeth, his strange, smoldering, compelling eyes, his vigorous yet graceful frame—small wonder that the Princess threw everything to the winds for such a man. Under the circumstances none of the nine would have waited half so long. The Princess' devotion to honor and duty seemed hardly less than morbid. Her patience under insults was positively exasperating. She clung to respectability with both hands—screamed, raged, but stuck to it as tight as a limpet—until a blow in the face, and the vilest of epithets from her brutal husband, toppled her finally to perdition—that is, if it were perdition to link the remainder of her life with that glorious being, and abandon everything for love.

The box applauded wildly, and led off the whole house. The curtain was made to rise again and again. Corrèze, advancing to the footlights, was left in no doubt as to where he had scored his heaviest hit, and rewarded those eager, girlish faces with a glance of his fine eyes, and a bow intended for them alone. Phyllis was the least enthusiastic of the party, and her silence during the first intermission was noisily commented on. She ate caramels slowly, and added nothing but monosyllables and an enigmatic smile to the rapturous demonstrations of her companions. But had they noticed her during the further course of the performance, they might have had something else to wonder at. With parted lips, and breath so faint that she seemed not to breathe at all—with a face paling to marble, and poignant with a curious and unreasoning distress, her eyes never quitted those

of Cyril Adair, and fixed themselves on his in a stare so troubled, so fascinated, that her soul seemed to leave her body and to pass the footlights.

## CHAPTER VII

The tea that followed was but a blurred memory, a confused recollection of noise and chatter, with a stab at the heart every time the actor's name was mentioned. She was thankful to get home, and lock herself in her room. She was in a tumult of shame, agitation, and an exquisite guilty joy. She partly undressed, and threw herself on her bed, shutting her eyes to win back the face and voice that had moved her to the depths. What had he done to her? A few hours before she had never known of his existence. The merest accident had revealed it to her, and now he was causing the blood to surge through her veins, and mantle her cheeks with dishonor. For it was dishonor. Everything in her revolted at such a position. His preposterous name struck fiercely on her pride and her sense of the ridiculous—Cyril Adair! How could any one, masquerading under such an egregious alias, dare to give her a moment's concern. She burst out laughing at herself, a contemptuous and bitter laugh. Cyril Adair! No dazzled little housemaid could have been sillier than she.

Yet his face haunted her, the tones of his voice, that strange, smoldering look in his eyes. How greedily that dreadful woman had kissed him! Those were no stage kisses. Before a thousand people she had abandoned herself to his arms, and fastened that painted mouth to his in an ecstasy. The audience thought it was acting. Phyllis, with a keener perception, saw the truth, and it made her savage with jealousy. That dreadful woman was shameless, crazy, beside herself. She had wooed him with every fiber of her body, pressing his head to her bosom, using every artifice to inflame him, and what had brought down the thunders of the house had not been a delineation of passion, but the naked thing itself.

It was horrible. Actors and actresses were horrible. No wonder they were despised even while they were run after. No wonder their lives were notorious. How could it be otherwise when—? But she envied that woman. Yes, she envied that woman, terrible as it was to admit it. Hated her, and envied her.—No, she pitied her as one of her own silly, headlong sex, cursed with this need to love. She was no longer young; she was thirty years old if a day; she was probably poor, disreputable, with nothing in the world but a trunk full of trashy finery,

and no home but a cheap hotel. Love was the only thing she had, poor wretch, the only thing.

And Cyril Adair? It was hard to imagine him in private life except as Corrèze. But, of course, he wasn't Corrèze—that was absurd. Perhaps he would be so changed that one would scarcely know him on the street. She had heard of such disillusionments—of tottering old men playing boys—and wasn't Bernhardt sixty? But a woman can tell, a woman who—who-cares. That vigorous manhood was no made-up pretense; such freshness, such warmth, such grace, could not be affected; he was certainly not much more than thirty, on the border line of youth and early-maturity when men, to her, possessed their greatest charm.

Lying there, in a swoon of shy delight, she allowed her fancy to fly away in dreams. Hand in hand, they trod a fairy-land of love and rapture. She stole sentences from his part, and made him repeat them to her alone—avowals, passionate and tender, in all the mellow sweetness of the voice that still reëchoed in her heart. He was Corrèze, and she, in the madness of her infatuation, had forced her way to him and thrown herself humbly at his feet. His love was not for her; she aspired to no such heights; but she had come to be his little slave; to follow him in his wanderings; to sleep across his door, and guard him while he slept. To be near him was all she asked. His little slave, who, when he was dejected and weary, would nestle beside him, and cover his hand with the softest kisses. She wanted no reward; she would try not to be jealous of those great ladies, though there would be times when she could not hold back her feelings, and his hand, as she drew it across her eyes, would be all wet with tears.

With her maid's knock at the door there came a sudden revulsion. Phyllis called to her to go away, unwilling to be seen in her defenselessness, and fearful of she knew not what. But the spell was broken. The bubble of that pretty fantasy vanished at one touch of fact. Harsh reality obtruded itself, and with it a pitiless self-arraignment. She had been swept off her feet by a third-class actor, in a third-class play, full of mawkish sentiment and unreality, in a third-class theater where they chewed gum, and ate apples while they wept over the hero's woes! A wave of self-disgust rose within her. She felt soiled, humiliated. How dared this cheap, showy creature reach out to take such liberties with a woman a thousand times above him? A creature, who in all probability ate with his knife, carried on low love affairs with admiring shop-girls, and practised his fascinations before a mirror, like a trick-monkey! Pah, the thought of her amorous imaginings reddened her cheeks, and consumed her with bitterness and shame. Where was her self-respect, her modesty? If wishes could have killed, there would have been no performance of *Moths* that night at the Thalia Theater.

At dinner she convulsed her father with an account of the play, in which neither Adair nor the audience were in any way spared. In her zest and mockery,

it all took on a richly humorous aspect, and at times she was interrupted by her own silvery peals of laughter. To hear her, how could any one have guessed that she had been stirred as she had never been stirred before, and that the screaming face she described had been in reality the one drama that had ever touched her? Was it in revenge for what she had suffered? Was it perversity? Or was it the attempt to conquer a physical attraction so irresistible that it tormented and terrified her even while she fought it with the best of all weapons—derision?

She passed a wretched night, tossing and turning on her bed in a whirl of emotions. She was haunted by that face which appeared to regard her with such reproach. Why had she betrayed him, it seemed to ask? The smoldering eyes, compelling always, were questioning and melancholy. That look, of such singular intensity, and with its strange and mysterious appeal to some other self of hers, again asserted its resistless power. She felt herself slipping back, in a languor of tenderness, to the mood that had shocked her so much before. In vain she repeated the saving words—threw out those little life-buoys to a swimmer drowning in unworthy love—“third-class actor”—“matinée hero”—“shop-girls’ idol.”—The drowning swimmer continued to drown, unhelped. The life-buoys floated away, and disappeared. Engulfing love, worthy or unworthy, drew down her spent body to the blue and coraled depths, and held her there, fainting with delight.

In our secret hearts, who has not, at some time or other, felt an unreasoning desire for one all unknown. Is love, indeed—true love, anything else? Glamour and idealization—we would not go far without either, and many, hand in hand, have trod the long path to the grave, and died happy with their illusions. Nature, to screen her coarser intent, fools us, little children that we are, with these pretty and poetic artifices. May it always be so, for God knows, it is an ugly world, and it does not do to peer too curiously behind the scenes.

There was a Mrs. Beekman that Phyllis knew, the widow of a distinguished lawyer, left with nothing, who had bravely set herself to earn her living as a milliner. It was to the credit of Carthage that Mrs. Beekman’s altered fortunes had not impaired its regard for her. She kept her friends in spite of the “Hortense” over her shop, and a window full of home-made hats, which, of themselves, would have amply justified ostracism. It was no new thing for Mrs. Beekman to act as chaperon, and repay, in this small measure, many kindnesses that verged on charity. So she was not surprised, though much pleased and excited, when Phyllis telephoned, and asked her to go with her to the theater. “I liked the play so much I want to see it again,” trickled that tiny voice into her ear, “and though it’s at that awful Thalia Theater, we can sit in a box, and be quite safe and comfortable.—May I call for you a little after eight, dear?”

Mrs. Beekman, who was an indefatigable pleasure-seeker, consented with effusiveness. Phyllis was a darling to have thought of her. One of her girls had told her the play was splendid, and that the star—oh, what didn't she say about the star! Was Phyllis crazy about him, too? Hee, hee, all alike under their skins, as Kipling said! Not that she liked Kipling—he was so unrefined—but Miss Britt (you know Miss Britt, the silly one, with poodle eyes, and a poodle-fool if ever there was one) Miss Britt raved for hours about his "somber beauty." Wasn't it killing! If Adair wanted to, he could leave town with two box-cars of conquests! My, the milliners wouldn't have a girl left, and the ice-cream parlors would all have to shut.—At eight, dear?—And dress quietly so as not to attract attention? Hee, hee, it was quite a lark, wasn't it?

Sitting in the same box, on the same chair, but with a feeling as though years had elapsed since she had last been there, Phyllis again saw the curtain rise on *Moths*. The impulse that had brought her, the mad desire to see the man who had tortured her so cruelly, had changed to a cold critical mood, to a disdain so comprehensive that it included herself no less than Adair. Dispassionate and contemptuous, it cost her no effort to steel herself against his first appearance. His mouth was undeniably rather coarse; she detected a self-complacency beneath his *Corrèze* that his acting failed to hide; she saw his glance seek the back-benches with a satisfaction at finding them filled, that struck her as somehow greedy and tradesmanlike. What a disgusting business it was to posture and rant, and choke back sham tears, and mimic the sacredest things in life—and watch back-benches with an eye to the evening's profits! The wretchedest laborer, with his pick and shovel, was more of a man. At any rate he did something that was dignified, that was useful and wanted. He was not framed in cardboard; there was no row of lights at his honest, muddy feet; his loving was a private matter, and when he kissed he meant it.—How fortunate it was that she had come! How unerring the instinct that had brought her back to be cured!

But as the play proceeded such reflections were forgotten in the intensity of her absorption. Again she was leaning forward with parted lips; rapt, overborne, lost to everything, and pale with an indescribable tumult of emotion. She was conscious of no audience; of naught save the man who held her captive with a power so absolute and irresistible that birth, training, pride, weighed as nothing in the balance. His voice pierced her heart; his eyes seemed to draw the soul from her body; she trembled at her own helplessness, though the realization of it was also a strange and intoxicating pleasure.

But intermingled with that pleasure, darting through it like a tongue of flame, was a jealousy of Miss de Vere that not even the bitterest of contempt

could allay. Phyllis felt to the full the degradation of being jealous of any one bearing so preposterous a name. Lydia de Vere! Her lips curled at herself. Oh, that shoddy affectation of aristocracy! Lydia de Vere! And that in a ten-twenty-thirty cent theater, and hardly clothed above the waist; and yet, in spite of her painted face, her dyed hair, and all of her thirty years, with shoulders and breast that a duchess might have envied, she was handsome in her common, flamboyant, chorus-girl way, with the meaningless good looks that one associates with tights and gilt spears. Her acting was stilted and false; her fine ladyism an impossible assumption; she railed at the Prince in the accents of a cook giving notice. But her love for Corrèze taxed no histrionic powers. It was vehement and real, as were the kisses she bestowed so freely, and the caresses she lingered over with voluptuous satisfaction. Beneath the drama of fictitious personages was another of flesh and blood, like a splash of scarlet on a printed page.

What fury and anguish lay pent up in one girlish bosom! What a suffocating sense of defeat, bitterness and shame!— To burn with jealousy of such a woman was more lowering than to— No, she would not admit that word to herself. It was folly, infatuation, madness—but not love. It would pass with the swiftness it had come, leaving her in wonder at herself, though the scar would remain for many a long day. This man was robbing her of something that never perhaps could be altogether replaced. How wicked it was, how unjust—she who had done nothing to tempt the lightning! She hated him for it; she clenched her teeth and defied him; she understood now what she had read in books that there are men the mind scorns even while the body surrenders. But she was made of stronger stuff; she had pride and courage; her pearls were not for swine to trample on. She would put him out of her head for ever.

It was terrible how he always got back again. There were tones in his voice that melted every resolution. If ever laughter was music, it was his, and the contagion of it swept the house; and his face, though not handsome in the accepted sense, was striking in the effect it gave of an untamed, extraordinary and powerful nature, only half revealed. What was pride or courage or anything? What availed the hatred of that hotly-beating little heart? Had he not but to look her way to make it his own? Had he crushed it in his hand, would it not have died of joy? Hatred, resentment, outraged self-respect—words, nothing but words.

As the house streamed out she waited in dread for Mrs. Beekman's criticism. However desperately she might belittle Adair to herself, Phyllis shrank from hearing condemnation on other lips. The pride that had failed so utterly to defend her, had taken sides with the enemy, devotedly, passionately. Judge of her surprise, then, her pleasure and relief, when Mrs. Beekman said to her solemnly: "Phyllis, that man's a genius! He's perfectly splendid!" Misunderstanding her companion's silence, and thinking it implied dissent, she went on with a note

of argument in her voice. "Of course one can feel somehow that he has had no advantages—that he has probably never been within ten miles of the people he is trying to represent—(do you remember his shaking hands with his gloves on?)—but just the same he has a wonderful and magnificent talent, and we'll hear of him as surely as the world heard of Henry Irving, or Booth, or Bernhardt. Truly, Phyllis, I believe the day will come when we'll be bragging of having admired Adair before he was famous; that is, if you feel like me about it," she added doubtfully.

"I do, I do!" cried Phyllis. "I've never seen anybody on the stage I've liked as much."

"Well, I have," said Mrs. Beekman candidly. "He certainly suffered from being with all those idiots, and I don't like that fling-ding walk of his.—I guess he's about five years short of the winning-post, but we'll see him romp in as sure as my name's Emma Beekman."

"Romping in" jarred somewhat on Phyllis' ear, but all the same Mrs. Beekman's admiration was very sweet to her, and in a queer sort of way was comforting and reassuring. There was dignity in idolizing a genius; it raised her in her own good opinion.

She forgot the apples and the chewing-gum; she forgot even Miss de Vere; a mantle of unreasoning happiness enveloped her, and with it came a gush of affection for Mrs. Beekman that quite astonished the latter. She held her hand in the dark, and tried, with many unseen blushes, to keep the one subject uppermost. To lie back in the carriage and hear Adair praised, thrilled her with delicious sensations. She was insatiable, and kept the milliner repeating "genius, genius, genius," like a parrot. It cost her an order for a twenty dollar hat, but what did she care? She would have given the clothes off her back in the extravagance of her desire. Fortunately Mrs. Beekman was nothing loath, and would have chattered for ever on this entrancing topic. "I guess we're as bad as my girls," she said, with her good-natured laugh, "and he could put us both in the box-car, too, if he had the mind."

"I shouldn't care if I was the only one," returned Phyllis gaily, "and anyway, I've always loved traveling!"

"It would be to the devil," said Mrs. Beekman half-seriously. "That's where such men come from, and that's where they go back—and if you could follow round the circle, I guess you'd find it mile-stoned with silly girls."

"Oh, if I went, I would stay to the end," cried Phyllis. "No putting me off at a way-station. I'd take a through ticket."

"And get there alone," put in Mrs. Beekman. "Men like that don't go far with any girl. They are a power for mischief, and they weren't much wrong in the old days to run them out of town—vagabonds and strolling players, you know. I guess in those times they used to take chickens, too, and anything portable. A

bad lot, my dear, and they aren't any better to-day."

This was a poor return for a twenty-dollar hat, and without knowing exactly why, it made Phyllis exceedingly miserable. She felt a diminishing affection for Mrs. Beekman; and the world altogether suddenly took on a cold and dismal aspect. Her spirits were not revived by finding her father sitting up for her.

"What was the play?" he asked, taking her wraps.

"*Moths*, Papa."

"What? Twice?"

"Oh, I thought it would amuse me to see it again, and besides, Mrs. Beekman preferred it to anything else in town, and I really went for her sake, you know. It's a charity to take her out sometimes; her life is so monotonous, and one feels so sorry for her."

Mr. Ladd waited, smiling in advance, for another humorous take-off of the piece. But there was no fun in Phyllis that night. She drank a glass of water, kissed him good night, and went silently up to bed.

"She doesn't seem very well," he thought, with a shade of concern, and remembered that she had been pale and tired for some days past. "If she doesn't pick up in a day or two, I believe I'll get the doctor."

Had he seen her an hour later, his misgivings would have increased. Kneeling beside her bed, her face crushed in the coverlet, she was weeping softly and heart-brokenly to herself.

## CHAPTER VIII

Friday, the day that followed, was memorable to her for its decisiveness and remorse. She took a long ride, and between canters, busied her head with plans of escape. Washington, Florida, Europe—it mattered little where—so long as she got away at once. She looked at herself dispassionately, and the more she looked the more utterly despicable did she seem. She was undoubtedly in love with this cheap, showy actor—(somehow in the sunshine his genius had withered, and he seemed to share the general tawdriness of gum and apples and shop-boy sentiment)—crazily in love, infatuated; and to refuse to admit it was but to hide her head in the sand, like an ostrich.

The comparison was not a pretty one, but then she was not looking for pretty comparisons. In fact, as far as her feelings for Adair were concerned, she

was eager to find words that could make her wince. She said them out loud, exulting in their brutality; gross words, picked up she hardly knew where, and put out of mind as unclean and horrible. To use them now was a form of self-flagellation, and she laid on the whip with a will. It was good for a little fool, she said viciously. Lash! lash! It would keep her out of mischief. Lash! lash! Let her understand once for all what it really meant, even if the skin curled off her back.

On her return home she stopped at the telegraph-office to carry out her intention of volunteering a visit to Aunt Sarah's. Night or day, in season or out, there she always had a refuge. If blood in Aunt Sarah's case, was not thicker than water, there was the more robust bond of hard cash always to be relied upon. A niece who descended in a shower of gold could count with confidence on the bread and salt of hospitality, and the sincerest of welcoming kisses. There is something to be said for people you can count on with confidence. An affectionate, love-you-like-a-daughter aunt might have made excuses. A money-loving, pleasure-loving, wholly selfish aunt, living very much above her income, was one of the certainties of life.

But as she reined in her horse, and the groom ran to give her his hand to dismount, she wondered, after all, whether she would telegraph. The flagellation had been very successful; the September sunshine had killed the pitiful glimmer of the footlights; the crisp invigorating air had brought sanity with every breath. No, indeed, she would not telegraph, she was not half the fool she had thought herself; it was a girlish weakness to exaggerate everything—infatuation included. She would telephone to that nice New Yorker instead and invite him to tea. That oldish man with the charming distinction and courtesy, who had shown symptoms of infatuation, too.—Yes, a good whipping to be followed by two hours of an excessively devoted Mr. Van Suydam, and perhaps a boy-and-girl-evening later with the carpet up—and why should anybody be scared of anything?

So the telegram was not sent; and a young lady, very much restored, and looking adorably fresh and pretty on her Kentucky mare, came galloping up Chestnut Avenue in excellent spirits and appetite.

As for Mr. Van Suydam—he threw over a big reception to come, and was so agreeable and eager, in such a sweet, restrained, smiling way, that he was allowed to hold a little hand a long, long while, and murmur a whole heartful of tender things that amounted virtually to a declaration—which was cruel of Phyllis, not to say unladylike and shocking; for with half-shut eyes she tried to imagine it was quite another man who was wooing her, and abandoned herself to the fiction with a waywardness that was inexcusable. But however unjust it was towards Mr. Van Suydam, who was an honorable man, and meant what he said, and was naturally much elated—his suit did Phyllis good, and even as dummy for another, an inevitable comparison would insist upon obtruding itself. Caste

is very strong; it is difficult to associate good-breeding, honor and distinction with a ten-twenty-thirty cent star; and though Mr. Van Suydam, was nothing to Phyllis personally she could not help realizing the high value she set on the qualities he exemplified—so high, indeed, that it began to seem impossible for her to care seriously for any man without them.

An evening with the sparrows rounded out that day of good resolves and healthy common sense. She danced with a zest that no genuinely-infatuated person could have felt, and told ghost stories afterwards before the fire, and listened to others being told, with shudders of unaffected enjoyment. "And my dear, when she looked at that man again, *she saw that his throat was cut from ear to ear.*"—It was a jolly evening, innocently hilarious, and as wholesome as an ocean breeze. Morbidity and introspection could not persist in an atmosphere so genially youthful. Phyllis never thought once of Cyril Adair, and flirted outrageously with Sam Hargreaves, convulsing the sparrows by sharing his ice-cream spoon. Ordinarily quiet and backward, and even a little disdainful, she showed herself in wild spirits that night, and her audacity, humor and gaiety were irresistible.

It was very discouraging, after a night's sleep, as untroubled as a babe's, to awaken again with a dull ache within her, and to discover, with hopeless despondency, that she was not cured at all. Alas for the girlish armor she had striven so hard to put about her—Mr. Van Suydam, Sam Hargreaves, the bitter, ugly things she had said to herself, the defiant resolutions. Where was that pride she had stung to fury? Where was that sense of caste which yesterday had seemed so peremptory?

The morning found her bereft of everything, wretched, defenseless, with no longer even the will to fly. She was under the spell once more, and powerless to throw it off. Her whole prepossession was to see Adair again, cost what it might. Nothing else mattered. She was mad, infatuated, contemptible to herself—but she could only be appeased by the sight of him. Yet how was it possible? How could she contrive it? She could not well ask Mrs. Beekman a second time. That any one should suspect her secret was intolerable—she would rather have died. The circle of her girl friends was too small to arrange another theater-party without submitting herself to unbearable innuendoes and home-thrusts. Those young women had a preternatural instinct for detecting the dawn of love. In other things they might be stupid and blind, but for this they were as watchful as hawks, and as merciless as only twenty can be. What of her admirers then—Mr. Van Suydam, say, or good-natured, fat Sam? But they could be very sharp, too—and besides, she could not be so forward as to seek an invitation. Young girls in

Carthage had a great deal of liberty—but it had its limits. Perhaps she could take one of the house-maids with her to the *matinée*—it was Saturday and the piece was given twice. But this would appear queer, especially if it reached her father.

There seemed nothing for it but to dress very plainly and go by herself. It was something to remember that *matinées* practically existed for women only—though attending one alone was unheard of in Phyllis' set. It was less a social law than a sort of fact. Girls went to *matinées* in pairs apparently—always had—and apparently always would. "Who did you go with, my dear?" was an inevitable question. Well, if necessary, one could meet that with a fib; and if one were found out, it was no great crime after all—but rather a mild escapade that a blush could condone. Of course a box was out of the question. She could not sit solitary in a box for the whole house to gape at. But there was nothing to prevent her buying two orchestra seats, so that any one recognizing her might draw a natural deduction. An adjoining empty seat was almost a chaperon, besides permitting her to widen her distance from an unpleasant neighbor. If there should be two unpleasant neighbors, she could always rise and walk out.

At two she was passing the Thalia Theater with an air of well-feigned unconcern, though her steps grew slower, and she stole quick frightened glances at the bustling entrance. She felt the need of such a preliminary survey before she could screw her courage up to the point of joining the in-going throng, who by daylight looked so depressingly dingy and common that she was fairly daunted by the sight of them. Even in the plainest clothes she possessed, she felt that she would be noticeable among people like that, and this was brought home to her the more by the impudent stare of several young men, who parted, none too politely, for her to pass. They knew she had no business there alone; that she belonged to another world; and there was speculation, as well as forward admiration, in the looks they cast at her. She felt they had somehow divined her hesitating purpose, and were grinning at her humiliation. She quickened her pace, and got by with fiercely flaming cheeks, and a desolating sense of failure.

But the desire was so overmastering that after a few minutes she turned, and again coerced her reluctant feet. Impudent young men could do her no harm. What a coward she had been to let them disconcert her. She would put down her sixty cents, and enter boldly, telling herself she was a factory girl, whose young man happened to be late. She might even leave the second ticket at the box-office with the phantom's name on it—though no, that would mean too much talking, and she distrusted her voice. But, anyhow, nothing was going to keep her out of the theater. Didn't soldiers walk tip to breastworks, bristling with guns and cannons—whole rows of them, with probably a very similar shakiness in their legs? She would advance on that box-office in the same spirit—right, left, right, left—rubadub, rubadub—with sixty cents in her hot little hand.

She had scarcely reached the outskirts of the crowd when she suddenly heard her name called aloud. It went through her like a knife, and she hardly dared turn her guilty head. There, beside the curb, in a big automobile, was Mr. Van Suydam, with a party of women in veils and furs, all signaling to her. There ensued an animated conversation. Where was she going? Why shouldn't she jump in with them? Mr. Van Suydam would sit on the floor of the tonneau, and give her his place. They were so insistent that it was not easy to refuse. She fibbed manfully, and invented pressing engagements.... At last they rolled off, waving their hands....

But this chance meeting cost her all the poor courage she possessed. Why, she could not explain to herself—but it was gone, and there was nothing for it but to hasten away. She felt she had escaped detection by a hair; the precious *matinée* was lost; her eyes smarted with disappointment and chagrin. She rankled with the injustice of it, too—the unmerited and unsought disaster that this infatuation really was. She was so wholly innocent of any blame. She had done nothing—absolutely nothing—to incur it. If you caught measles or smallpox every one was sorry for you; it was admittedly a misfortune for which you were in no way responsible. But if you caught love (she smiled at her own phrase), it was an unspeakable disgrace! Yet what was the difference? Did it not lie outside one's self? How unjust it was, then, to make a criminal of a woman for what was beyond her power to control; and the exasperating part was that she felt a criminal to herself!

Her heart was heavy with shame. One instinct made her love unreasonably; another instinct arrogated the right to criticize with unsparing venom. What a contradiction! What a cruel heritage from all those thousands of dead people who had gone to make her body and her mind with odds and ends of themselves! She had done no harm, yet some blind, unknown, malignant force was grinding her under its heel. She understood now why old-fashioned people believed so implicitly in the devil. It was their crude explanation of the unexplainable.

She locked herself in her room, and impelled by a thought that had been dancing dizzily in her head, opened her desk, and drew out a sheet of note-paper. She managed to write: "Dear Mr. Adair"; and then, blushing crimson, covered her face with her hands, and began to tremble with an uncontrollable emotion. To continue that letter—to send it—was to outrage every feeling of modesty within her. Under the circumstances any letter, however cold or conventional, was an avowal. She might almost as well write "*je t'adore*" under her photograph, and leave it at the stage-door. But that blind, unknown, malignant force, after a moment of respite, again drove her on. She might shiver and blush, but the compulsion of it was like iron, and she had to obey.

"Dear Mr. Adair," she wrote, "I have seen *Moths* twice, and may I, a mere

member of the public, and altogether unknown to you, take the great liberty of expressing my admiration of your wonderful performance?" She stopped at the last word, and debated it over with herself—quite coolly, considering the throes she had been in a minute before. No, "performance" would not do. Bears performed; so did acrobats; it was not the right word at all.—She took another sheet of paper, and began again: "Dear Mr. Adair: I have seen *Moths* twice, and may I, a mere member of the public, and altogether unknown to you, take the great liberty of expressing my admiration of your powerful portrayal of a noble nature struggling against an illicit passion? Nothing I have ever seen on the stage has moved me so deeply, and though praise from an absolute stranger may seem little in your eyes, I can not resist the impulse that makes me write. Trusting you will receive this in the spirit that prompts it, believe me, in sincere homage, Phyllis Ladd."

She read it, and re-read it till the words lost all meaning. What would he think of it? What sort of person would it conjure up to him? The hand, and the paper, and the engraved address all denoted refinement and good taste. It would be quite evident to him that she was a lady, with a social position of the best—that is, if he knew what Chestnut Avenue meant in Carthage, and especially such a number as 214. But there was nothing to show that she was young, or unmarried—or—or—good-looking. The letter might just as well have been written by a matron of fifty. If only she could have added "aged twenty-one, and generally considered a very pretty woman." She would have liked him to know that, even if she were never to see him again; would have liked to tantalize his curiosity in regard to the unknown Phyllis Ladd whose name was signed at the end.—Though he probably received bushels of notes. All actors were said to. And being a man he would probably like some of the warmer ones better—those from frankly adoring shop-girls, hampered neither by social position nor backwardness. Hers would be pushed to one side, and never thought of again. Oh, the little fool she was to send it! What could come of it but shame, and good Heavens, hadn't she had enough of that already?

But undeterred, and wilful in spite of everything, she addressed an envelope, folded her letter inside it, and went out to drop it herself into the box. As it slipped from her fingers she felt an intense pleasure in her daring. It was only a coward who took no risks. There was her letter in the box gone beyond retaking. For better or worse, for good or evil, it had started on its road, and let come what

might.

## CHAPTER IX

The next morning, towards noon, Cyril Adair was lounging over the bar of the Good Fellows' Grotto, with one well-shod foot perched on the metal rest below. Before him was a Martini cocktail, and the admiring, deferential face of Larry, the bar-keeper. Adair stood the scrutiny of daylight better than most actors. Late hours, dissipation and grease-paint had not impaired a fine and ruddy skin that the morning razor left as fresh as a boy's. His brown eyes were clear, and there was about him an air of unassailable health that was enhanced by broad shoulders, a neck as firm as any ever cut from Greek marble, and a finely-swelling chest—the physique, in fact, of what he had some pretensions to be—a good, welter-weight boxer. His skill in this direction was well known, and his readiness when tipsy to exercise it on any one unfortunate enough to offend him, was one of the scandals of his stormy and scandalous life. His engagements, nine times out of ten, had the knack of ending in the police court, with raw beefsteak for the plaintiff's eye, and the option of "seven day's hard" for the uncontrite defendant. Even when stark sober—and to do him justice he drank only in fits and starts, with long intermissions between—there was something subtly formidable in the man, and people instinctively made way for him, and treated him with a respect verging on fear.

He was over-dressed in what was the last accentuation of the prevailing fashion—with far too much braided cuff, with far too startling a waistcoat, with far too extravagant a tie and pin—and worse than anything, wore them all with assertiveness and self-complacency. Though his manners were good (when he liked,) and his address agreeable, and even ingratiating, he was too showy, too self-satisfied, too elaborately at ease, and his assurance seemed to rest, not on the conventional groundwork of birth and breeding, but rather on his power and will to knock you through the door if he cared to take the trouble.

Of course, he was profoundly ignorant, knowing nothing, reading little, his life bounded by the footlights on one side, and the stage-door on the other—and like all such men perpetually nervous lest he should be found out. His inherent ability was enormous—as enormous as his vanity. He had fought his way up from nothing—from the muddy streets in which he had sold papers, and begged, and

starved, his whole boyhood long. He was full of instincts that had never had the chance of becoming anything more—instincts, which, if cultivated, might have made him a very different man. He was passionately fond of bad music; delighted in the only pictures he knew, those in hotels and saloons; he had, stored away in a memory that never forgot anything, half the plays of Shakespeare, and thousands of lines of trashy verse. A savage, in fact, in the midst of our civilization, which, after trying to grind him into powder, and denying him everything, was unjust enough to despise him heartily for what he had made of himself unaided. Could he have refrained from taking offense at trifles, and from punching people's heads, he could easily have retained the high place he had once held on the New York stage. He had no one to thank but himself if he were now touring the country in a fifty-class company, with an enemy in every manager who had ever employed him. He had a strong, unusual talent. In the delineation of somber and misunderstood natures, contradictory, pent-up, heroic—the out and out bad man with a spark of good—he was admitted by metropolitan critics to have no equal in America. Others copied him slavishly and made successes, while he, their inspiration and their model, remained comparatively unknown. There were times when he felt very badly about it, but a pretty face and a provocative petticoat could always divert his attention. Needless to say he had not to look far to find either.

"Larry," he asked nonchalantly, "do you know any people in Carthage here named Ladd?"

"I don't believe I do, Mr. Adair," returned Larry, scratching his head. "Leastways, none except Robert T. R. Ladd, the railroad president." Larry was unable to conceive that this mighty name could possibly have any bearing on Adair's question. "No, I don't believe I do."

"Oh, the railroad president? Any family?"

"Just one daughter."

"Well, go on—tell me about her."

"Why, there isn't much to say, except people call her the prettiest girl in Carthage—but then they always say that of a millionaire's daughter—Emma Satterlee would turn the milk sour, and yet in the society notes—"

"Did you ever see her?—No, no, I don't mean that one—the railroad man's—the Ladd girl?"

"Yes, I saw her onst in a church fair. She hit *me* all right. Slender brunette, very aristocracy, with the kind of eyes that if you're *fond* of brunettes—seem like—"

"How old is she?"

"Hell, how do I know! Twenty—twenty-one—something around there. Just a girl."

"And the prettiest one in Carthage?" repeated Adair, sipping his cocktail as though the description pleased him.

"Well, I would leave *my* happy home for her," said Larry, with a grin. "Pretty—I'd say she was pretty—pretty enough to eat."

"Lives out Chestnut Avenue way, doesn't she?"

"Yes, in the stone house that's set back in a kind of park, with a big gate in front and a driveway. The Ladds' are at the top of the top, you know. My, I felt I was breaking into the swell bunch myself when she told my fortune for a dollar. If I had had the nerve and the money I guess she would be telling it yet! And she smiled so sweet when she took it, like I was as good as anybody. God forgive me if I seem to talk disrespectful of her, for she's a lady through and through, and I knew it even if I was only a bar-keeper."

"Toss you for the drinks," said Adair, draining his glass. "Hand over the box, Larry."

"Sure Mike," said the bar-keeper rattling the dice.

Adair encountered an acquaintance, a commercial traveler named Hellman, on the sidewalk outside.

"Just the fellow I wanted to see," he cried. "Hellman, there is such a word as temerity, isn't there?"

"Bet your life," said Hellman. "The temerity of my playing *Hamlet*, you know—the temerity of you thinking yourself a better-looking man than I am—the temerity of—"

"And you spell it t-e-m-e-r-i-t-y?" interrupted Adair.

"Yes, why?"

"Oh, I used it in a letter I was writing to a girl, and I didn't want to mail it till I was sure." He showed the envelope in his hand, with his thumb hiding the name.

"Always at it," said Hellman, with an unpleasant laugh. "Who are you throwing the handkerchief at now?"

"The prettiest girl in Carthage," returned Adair genially. "There's a box over there—let's drop it in."

And together they crossed the street, and sent the letter on its way.

It was to Phyllis, begging in warm but respectful language for the privilege

of calling on her.

## CHAPTER X

"Dear Mr. Adair: I hardly expected you to reply to my note, nor could I have thought it would please you so much as you say. Indeed, I hope you will not misjudge it—or me—for it was written on the same impulse that makes one applaud in the theater itself, and with no ulterior idea. Frankly, I do not think I ought to ask you to call—the circumstances are so peculiar—and it is all so against the conventionalities. In Washington or New York it would be different, but this little place—like all little places—is strait-laced beyond belief. It will be my loss more than yours, which perhaps will be some consolation to you. Yet it seems too stupid to say no—that is, if you really *do* want to come—and I am going to ask you after all. Surely a little talk over a cup of tea to-morrow at five ought not to arrest the stars in their courses, or bring down the pillars of the universe on our unfortunate heads? And if any one should come in, we might say that we had met before in Washington? That would place our acquaintance on a more correct footing, and save me, at least, the possibility of embarrassment. Is this asking too much of you? Sincerely yours, Phyllis Ladd."

## CHAPTER XI

There are men who pursue women with a skill, zest and pertinacity that others do bears or tigers, and with very much the same hardihood and delight. In the rich preserves of the world, so well stocked with youth and beauty, they find an unending enjoyment, and an unending occupation. No sooner have they brought down one, and beheld her bleeding and stricken at their feet, than they are up and off, with another notch on their gun, and fresh ardor in their hearts. They are debarred from taking the tangible trophies of skin and head; a slipper, a glove, a bundle of letters are often all they have to show; but within them wells the satisfaction of the hunter who has made a "kill."

Amongst this race of sportsmen there were few hardier or more daring than Cyril Adair. That the game was cruel or cowardly had never occurred to him. The women he knew—all of the lower class—frequently played their side of it with eyes wide open, and ran—not to escape—but with the full intention of being caught. This is not urged in his extenuation. Often he was not aware of the subterfuge. Women to him were but prey, and in more venerable times he would have waylaid any lady he favored, with a club.

Behold him in immaculate afternoon costume, striding along Chestnut Avenue—boutonniere, silk-hat, cane, new suede gloves, etc.—a devil of a fellow in his own estimation, with an air and a swagger that reflected his profound contentment with himself. He had never gone a-hunting before in such a splendid wood. The thought that he was actually going to invade one of those imposing mansions made his pulses leap. How big they were, how aristocratic! What incomes they represented! What mysteries of ease and luxury lay hidden behind those stately windows! He was tremendously stirred; tremendously excited. He swelled with self-complacency. He was hardly over thirty, he was handsome, he was a genius—and the women loved him!

A man-servant admitted him. Yes, Miss Ladd was expecting him. His hat and cane were taken, while he gazed, somewhat daunted, at the immense hall in which he found himself. He had a confused sense of tapestries; of stone bas-reliefs very worn and old; of oriental rugs; of strange-looking, moldy chairs, straight-backed and carved, with massive arms, on which there was still the fading gilt of the fifteenth century.—He was led through another room of a similar cold and spacious magnificence, and then up-stairs to the drawing-room. Here he was left, while the man departed to inform his mistress of the visitor's arrival.

The elegance and beauty with which Adair found himself surrounded fairly took his breath away. His only standard was that of fashionable hotels, yet here was something that made the splendors of the Waldorf or the Auditorium seem suddenly tawdry in comparison. His instinctive good taste was ravished by the old Venetian brocades, the rich dark pictures, the Sheriton furniture, the harmonious blending of all these, and so many other half-seen and half-comprehended things into a gracious and exquisite whole. Near him was the table set out for tea, with silver that it was a joy to look at; and about the little island it made in the vastness of the room was a wealth of red roses, marking as it were the boundaries of coziness and intimacy.

Adair's complacency was not proof against such aristocratic and undreamed of surroundings. His exultation fell, and pangs of self-pity assailed him. What was he but a child of the gutter, an outcast—a man full of yearning for the unattainable, who had been starved and kept down by merciless circumstances? Such swift transitions were not unusual in his peculiar and contradictory nature.

After all, he was an artist, even if often a brute and a fool, and somewhere within him, very much overlaid and shrouded, there was a spark of the divine fire. Yes, he said to himself, he was coarse and common, and ignorant and unrefined. He had done much with himself; he had achieved wonders, considering the handicap he had always been under—but admitting all that, what enormous deficiencies still remained! How ill at ease he was in such a room as this! How hard he would have to strive to hide his lack of knowledge and breeding! He had almost wished he had never come. In such a place he was an intruder—a boor—condemned to blunder through a part with no author's lines to help him.

As it turned out, nothing could have been more fortunate for him than this dejected mood. First appearances are everything, and he might easily—so easily—have made an intolerable impression. Indeed, in the cold fit, almost the terror, succeeding the impulse that had caused Phyllis to invite him, she was prepared to find him forward, and perhaps eager to take advantage of her recklessness, and misconstrue it. At the hint of such a thing she would have frozen; and the fact that she would only have had herself to blame would have doubled her humiliation. A woman who makes the first advances to a man is more capable than any of sudden revulsions. Her pride is on edge, and morbidly apprehensive.

But the grave, quiet, handsome man awaiting her dispelled these fancies as soon as their eyes had met. He thanked her with an embarrassment not unbecoming under the circumstances, for the unconventionality that had given him the privilege of meeting her. His smile as he said this was charming; his respect and courtesy beyond reproach; that other nature of his, the artist-nature, so quick and responsive in its intuitions warned him to put a guard on himself. Besides, if the room had over-awed him, how much more overpowering was the apparition of this slim and radiant woman, the mistress of all this splendor, whose pure dark face filled him with an indefinable sense of another world in which he was but a clod. Though he was a connoisseur of pretty women, and had possessed in his disreputable past many of greater physical beauty than Phyllis, not one of them had had the least pretensions to what in her appealed to him so strongly—distinction. From her glossy hair to the tips of her little feet, she was the embodiment of race, of high-breeding and high spirit; it was as marked in her girlish beauty as in any thoroughbred. She was the child of those who had admitted no superior save their God and their King.

Adair found himself bereft of all his assurance. The professional besieger, accustomed to advance with sureness and precision, unaccountably held back, hardly knowing why his heart had turned to water. It seemed presumptuous enough that he should even talk on terms of equality with one so immeasurably above him. His humility was painful. He stammered. He colored. His hand trembled on his tea-cup as he strove to keep alive a conversation of the usual

commonplaces.

"Miss Ladd," he said suddenly, "you mustn't think I am a gentleman—because I am not. I am not accustomed to this kind of thing; you are the first lady I—I've ever met." He arrested the expostulation on her lips and went on hurriedly. "It's much better to tell you that right off. I don't know those books you speak of; I don't know anything very much; I am awfully uncultivated and ignorant. There, I have said it! It will make me feel more comfortable, and it will be lots better than pretending I am something I'm not."

"You are a great actor, Mr. Adair."

"My God," he returned with simplicity, "sometimes I'm not so sure that I am." Then he burst into laughter at his own artlessness—a delightful laugh, contagious and musical, that no one could hear without liking him the better. Phyllis laughed, too, and somehow with it the ice seemed broken, and constraint disappeared. "Miss Ladd," he went on, "people like you, and places like this, are the realities which we try so hard to copy with our poor theatrical pasteboard and calico. I used to hate Mansfield for saying we ought to work as servants amongst—well, people we couldn't meet in any other way, and yet the ones we are audacious enough to represent on the stage. He meant it as an insult, of course—but he was right in some ways. Just seeing you pour tea makes me feel how badly we do even that!"

Phyllis, naturally, was touched and flattered.

"Why, we just pour it anyhow," she said, smiling.

"Precisely," exclaimed Adair, "and now let me do it our way!" He drew nearer the table, put his hand to the tea-pot, and grimacing at an imaginary company, proceeded to pour and pass several imaginary cups with a grotesque affectation of grace and elegance. "Two lumps, dear Sir James?—Patricia, the Bishop is famishing for some almond cake.—Oh, mercy me, and what's become of the Dook?" It was an admirable bit of mimicry, and so gay and captivating in its satire that Phyllis thought she had never seen anything so clever. She laughed with delight and clapped her hands.

"Though you shock me, too," she protested. "Corrèze mustn't do things like that—it isn't in keeping."

"Corrèze?"

"Yes, you are not Mr. Adair to me, though I know that's your name, and I have invited you. I can only think of you as Corrèze."

"Was I as good as that in the part?"

"I told you what I thought of it in my note."

"And you really meant it?"

"Would I have written if I hadn't? It was an awful thing to do. I can't think of it without burning with shame.—How can you say you are not a gentleman,

Mr. Adair? Only a gentleman would have put the right construction on it.”

He was questioning her face with his fine eyes. His intuition again stood him in good stead. This was not provocation, it was innocence. To himself he said: “No, it is impossible.”

Then aloud: “It was the only construction—and I felt childishly pleased. We’re great children, you know, we actors; and after all, are we to blame for liking approbation? Just think a moment. How close it all is to the ridiculous, our standing up there and declaiming all sorts of red-hot emotions, with painted paper on one side, and bald-headed fiddlers on the other! Doesn’t it sometimes come over a man—sort of shoot through him—the feeling of what a monkey-spectacle he is making of himself? *You* go ahead and play Lady Macbeth in a nightgown; rage and strut before those cold, scornful faces. Then let one amongst them cry: ‘Bravo, bravo,’ and give you a hand!—My Lord, you’d give him your watch and chain, your diamond pin—don’t you see, he returns you your self-respect, makes your work worth the doing?—and that’s what your note did for me, Miss Ladd.”

“Oh, Mr. Adair, don’t talk to me about the cold, scornful faces at your performance. I was there twice, and saw how they called you out!”

“Miss Ladd,” he said, his strong, handsome, eager face whimsically alight, “let me confess the honest truth—an actor simply can’t have enough admiration!”

“You worry me for fear I didn’t make mine warm enough! For really, Mr. Adair, in all sincerity, I—”

“Well, go on.”

“Bravo, bravo!” Her lips parted mockingly over her white teeth as she pretended to applaud madly. It was the daintiest teasing, and more charming in the intimacy it implied than any downright praise. Adair glowed with a pleasure so honest and boyish that Phyllis might be forgiven for not suspecting the baser depths he hid so well.

“I’m a conceited ass,” he admitted, “and after all, isn’t it enough to turn a man’s head to be here with you, and feel I owe it to the ginger I put into *Corrèze*? Most people get their friends by introductions and all that, but I just snatched you out of a whole theater full of strangers. For you are my friend, aren’t you, Miss Ladd?”

“Yes, *Corrèze*.”

“You’ll be making me jealous of the chap,” he cried running his hands through his hair with make-believe exasperation. “I think he is a good deal of a whining humbug myself, and the sly way he throws bouquets at himself is disgusting. Miss Ladd, I am ever so much nicer than he is—really I am—though I see I shall never be able to convince you.”

“No reason why you shouldn’t try.”

“Perhaps I am ashamed to,” he returned, with an intensity of expression

that became him well. "You find me in a wretched little theater, the cheapest of cheap stars—the hoodlum's pet, the shop-girl's dream—and how can it help coloring your whole idea of me? You admire my *Corrèze*, but for me myself how can you have anything but contempt? No, no—listen—it's true—and the more you knew of my history the more contemptuous you'd be. I've been rated very high; I've had every chance in the world; I've played with the biggest kind of people, and—succeeded. Yet I have always been the dog who hanged himself. No, there is no mystery about it—there never is with a man who is sinking—a man of ability. It's his own fault every time—every, every time."

His earnestness made Phyllis thrill. Adair was playing his best rôle—himself, and playing it with the fire and eloquence he could always bring to it. His voice, incomparable in the beauty and range of its tones, was never so effective as when tinged with emotion. Nothing was more manly, more sincere, more moving. It rose and fell in cadences that lingered in the ear after the words themselves were spoken—veritable music, affecting not only the listener, but the musician as well. Under the spell of it he now found himself tempted into strange confidences. Never before had he spoken of his childhood and early life except to lie, to brag, to romance. Yet here, to his own wonder, and impelled by he hardly knew what, he was unbosoming himself of the whole ignoble truth. That instinct of his, so often wiser than himself, so diabolically helpful, was showing him the right road. Had Phyllis been some little milliner this would have been no road at all; such a one would have been too familiar with the seamy side of life to find any glamour in the tale; such a one would have preferred the bogus palaces and bogus splendors his instinct would then have indicated. Phyllis' intelligence was too keen thus to be deceived; even genuine splendors would have interested her less than this pitiful story of the slums; it not only touched her sensibility to the quick, but enhanced Adair in her tender and sympathetic eyes.

His father had been an Englishman—a remittance man named Mayne—George Cyril Augustus Fitzroy Mayne. Whether his pretensions were justified or not, and they were inordinate, including "Wales" and "Cambridge," he was beyond all doubt a gentleman, with grand manners, a back like a ramrod, and a curt, military directness in speaking. He used to say "dammy"; was fond of alluding to himself as "an old Hussar"; was wont to remark that a gentleman could always be told by his hat and his boots; and once, when attacked on the street, had shown extraordinary courage and adroitness in defending himself with a light cane. This was about all Adair remembered of him, except that he drank hard; had recurring fits of delirium tremens in which he raged and fought like a wild beast; and finally, dying in a hospital ward, was buried like a dog in the Potter's Field.

Adair's mother had been an Irish peasant girl. She was kind and warm-

hearted, and spoke with a brogue; she was always laughing and singing, even under circumstances when a right-minded person would have thrown himself into the East River. She drank, too. Everybody drank. He used to be given sips from her glass, and knew what it was to be tipsy before he was eight. It was about that time he began to sell papers on the streets, for his father was dead, and his mother— Well, he wouldn't go into that. But in her way she had always been good to him. She wouldn't let the men beat him. When she was sent to the Island for the second time he thought his little heart would break. She didn't last long after that. How could she, gone as she was in consumption, and drinking like a fish? Oh, what a hell it was—what a hell! His pennies were all his own now, though he often had to fight to keep them. He was always fighting to keep them—first in desperation, then by degrees with some coolness and science. The bigger boys coached him; egged him on; he became a regular little bantam. They'd make up a purse—a quarter or something—and set two little wretches to pounding each other. Anything was allowed, you know—biting, kicking, scrooging, hair pulling! There was only one rule, and that was to win.

Well, so it went on, till he was sixteen or thereabouts, the toughest young tough you could see on Avenue A. He was nicknamed Fighting Joe, and they used to get up cheap little matches for him in the back rooms of saloons—real fighting, stripped to the waist, and four ounce gloves. His only ambition was to get into the prize ring, and in his dreams at night he would see his picture in the *Police Gazette*. Then the Settlement workers came—a pale-looking outfit, with Mission furniture and leaflets. They were regarded as a great infliction—as an insult to an honest tough neighborhood. It was the correct thing to break their windows, and lambast their followers. Fighting Joe took a prominent part in this righteous task. What did it matter that several of them were women? What did such brutes care for that? If ever there was a young savage on earth it was he.

One of the women was tall and pretty—not very young—twenty-eight or twenty-nine perhaps. Miss Cooke, she was—Miss Grace Cooke. She would never see him but what she would turn white with anger and fear. You see, everything was put down to him, all that he did do, and all that he didn't—and totaling up both sides of it, it ran to a lot. He couldn't begin to remember the caddish things he was answerable for; he didn't care to try; my God, what a brute he was, what a brute! And yet he admired this woman; guessed he was in love with her in a calfy way; took every chance to see her—and insult her! Of course, there wasn't the faintest reason why he shouldn't have walked into the Settlement, said he was sorry, and have been received with open arms. But people like that can't say they are sorry—they don't know how. Besides, the social disgrace of it would have been awful! Joe Mayne running with that gospel gang! The thing was incredible.

Late one winter afternoon he saw her in the midst of a crowd of hobblede-

hoys, hooting and jeering at her. She was walking as fast as she dared, looking straight ahead of her, and pretending not to notice. It was dark; the street was empty; and if she was scared she had mighty good reason for it. One of the fellows lurched against her, and down she went on the sidewalk; as she tried to rise another rolled her over, and tore her hat off. Of course, it was a great joke, and they were all roaring with laughter. Then it was he came running up—Joe—and when she saw him she gave him a look he would remember to the day he died. Oh, the terror of it—the shrinking! But he smashed one on the jaw, caught another between the eyes, and lifted her up, half fainting as she was, and tried with his dirty hands to smooth her hair, and put on her hat again.—That’s how they came to be friends; that’s how he came to be landed in the Settlement; everything real in his life dated from that moment.

He was with them two years; with them as long as she lived. There wasn’t a good quality in him that she didn’t put there. On census forms, and such things, when asked his religion, he always felt inclined to write: “Grace Cooke.” By God, it would have been the truth. She was his religion yet, far though he had fallen away from it—oh, so far—! She stood for everything that was good and beautiful and noble. It wasn’t love. It was beyond all love. She was a Madonna, a saint, and he had had the privilege to kneel at her feet—a Caliban of the slums, a tough, a hoodlum, unworthy to touch the hem of her garment. Then she died, and that was the end of it. He didn’t care for the Settlement after she died. He got a job as chucker-out in a low place called the Crystal Palace. There was a dais, and performers used to sing. He thought he would try it himself, and made quite a hit. Then he began giving recitations—*The Fi-erman’s Dream*, and that kind of thing, and they caught on. He owed it all to Grace Cooke, who had taught him to read—(not ordinary reading, he had picked that up somehow for himself)—but real reading, dramatic reading. From this it was a step to monologues in costume, and from that to the vaudeville stage.

Sitting there in the growing dusk, and in an atmosphere so conducive to confidence, Adair unfolded his early life with a tender, persuasive and charming humor. He often laughed; often he was silent; again and again he would look up, and seek Phyllis’ eyes in a lingering glance as though to assure himself of her interest. For once in his life he was shy; the slim, pretty hand he gazed at so covetously was safe from any touch of his; something told him that the least familiarity would cost him all he had gained.—It was not policy on his part. He was too humble to think of policy. To be with her alone seemed presumption enough—to feel her sympathy, her friendship. Not a word or act of his should mar that wonderful day.

He rose, apologizing for having stayed so long.

“It is your own fault,” he said, holding out his hand, “you’ve made me forget

everything.”

”I’m afraid it was the other way round, Mr. Adair,” she returned, trying to smile, and thankful for the darkness that veiled her face.

”Am I ever to see you again?”

She shook her head.

”You mean it is good-by, Miss Ladd?”

”Yes, it’s good-by.”

Her hand was in his, so soft, so motionless, yet somehow so reluctant to leave his grasp. His head was turning; he could not go like that. No, no, he could not. He suddenly pulled her towards him, and caught her in his arms, kissing her hair, her cheek, her mouth, with a passion that cared little whether she was crushed or smothered in his embrace. Good God, what was he doing? After holding back so long, what diabolical folly had tempted him to this? Yet she had said it was good-by. He had nothing to lose. Let her pant and struggle and tremble, he would take tribute of her beauty nevertheless, however much she was insulted or outraged. His lips were wet with her tears. He forced her to receive his kisses on her mouth, exulting in the strength that allowed her no escape. But was she resisting him? A tremor of maddening delight shot through his frame. Her mouth was seeking his, and he heard her whispering breathlessly: ”I love you, I love you, I love you!”

It was so unexpected, so surprising, that he let her free. She sank into a chair and covered her burning face, repelling him as he threw himself on his knees beside her.

”If you don’t go, I shall never forgive you!” she exclaimed. ”Haven’t you shamed me enough? Do you want me to die of humiliation?” Then, from the heart, came the woman’s cry: ”What will you think of me?”

That instinct, which in Adair took the place of conscience, honor, all the conventional virtues and restraints, again came steadfastly to his help. He bent down; kissed her on the brow; and getting his hat and cane abruptly took his departure.

## CHAPTER XII

The dictionary with unhesitating positiveness informs us that infatuation is ”unreasonable or extravagant passion.” But are there not those who have stayed un-

reasonably impassioned to the end, those whose earthly parting has been but at the grave? And does not love of the admitted, recognized, unextravagant, very much approved, bless-you-my-children kind only too often ring out its knell in the divorce court? That Phyllis was infatuated with this good-looking scamp was beyond question, if by that one meant his physical attraction held her as much a slave as any of our ravished ancestors in the Vikings' boats. Her will was gone; her judgment; all her nicely-balanced highly-critical young-ladyism. It was horrifying to her to realize it; her powerlessness was at once an agony and a delight; it came over her, with a frightening sense of injustice, that a woman's happiness lies beyond herself, and is for ever dependent on some man.

Naturally she sat down, and wrote him a sad little letter. He was to forget everything that had passed, and not misjudge her for an uncontrollable impulse. Were he to presume upon it, she would not only die of shame, but would be forced to perceive that her trust had been misplaced. As a gentleman and a man of honor—and she knew him to be both—he would understand that it was impossible for them ever to meet again, and that her good-by was indeed irrevocable. But her good wishes would always attend him, and she would sign herself, in all sincerity, his friend, Phyllis Ladd. This done, she waited in a fever of impatience for his answer, hoping, dreading, tumultuously inconsistent, hot fits and cold succeeding each other in her troubled and anxious heart.

It may be imagined how unkindly Adair took her commands. In his large, straggling hand, and over six sheets of hotel paper he expressed his energetic dissent. It was a trite letter—flowery and theatrical—her haunting eyes, the memory of her adorable beauty, the despair of a man who had found love only to lose it, etc. Had Phyllis been herself it would have made her smile. Nothing, indeed, could have shown how far she had traveled on the road of illusion than her acceptance of these well-worn phrases. The tears sprang to her eyes at the smooth and nicely-rounded description of his wretchedness; she glowed and thrilled at the praise of herself, its boldness redeemed by what she ascribed to a lover's ardor; the pathetic plea for another meeting was irresistible. It might be unwise; it was sure to be painful; but, after all, it was his right. He loved her; he bowed to her decision; his life was hard at best, and now doubly so; what he asked was so little for her to give, yet to him it was everything—to see her once more before they parted for ever.

They met this time at the corner of a remote street. He was very pale, very quiet, and it was not a lie he told her that he had been unable to sleep for thinking of her. Had she known better what those thoughts were she would have shrunk from him. But, fortunately or not, she did not know. She, too, was quiet and

pale, and it was with the sense of an impending fate that she took his arm, and slowly walked with him along the foot-path. Unconsciously he was more masterful with her, now that she was away from that daunting house, and that awe-inspiring drawing-room. The sanctity that had enveloped her there had largely disappeared. Here was a situation he was used to—a distractingly pretty girl, a sidewalk rendezvous, and an infatuation that needed but the right handling to bring it to the proper conclusion.

Yet with everything so plain—and apparently so easy, Adair himself was in a whirl of strange and new emotions. Something had pierced his colossal selfishness, and was disturbing him. It was annoying at a time when he needed all his wits about him, and he resented it as a symptom of unmanly weakness. One drop of real love in that ocean of sham was threatening to poison the whole. He did not put it thus concretely. He only knew that he was uncomfortable, and not rising as he should to the occasion. Except for that far-away Grace Cooke he had never known a decent woman. His counterfeit love had been lavished on counterfeit innocence: and counterfeit purity. Fooling, he had always been fooled.

But this proud and melting young beauty lay outside of all his experience. Had she defended herself he would have known better how to attack. But she made no demur when he took her hand and kissed it; she did not resist, when, after looking up and down the street to see if they had it to themselves, he caught her boldly in his arms, and crushed her against himself, murmuring a torrent of words that came so readily to his practised lips. How radiantly she smiled when he tore off a tiny corner of her letter, and told her she had to eat it as a punishment. Her saucy obedience put him in a seventh heaven, and it was with a sort of ecstasy that he snatched it from her, fearful lest it might do her harm. That letter, in one sense, had been disposed of almost as soon as they had met. She had tried, for a moment or two, to adhere to it, and to make him see the necessity of that good-by. But under the glamour of his presence she faltered and broke down, and all that was left of the matter was her incoherent plea for forgiveness. What tenderness she put into this request! There never could be a good-by between them—never, never—and her eyes swam with tears at her disloyalty to him.

Both felt an uplifting gaiety and light-heartedness, as she said, in extenuation of her happy laughter, that they were like people who had grown rich overnight, for had they not discovered an enormous nugget—a nugget of love? It had been lying there for any to find, but they had been the lucky ones! They had a right to be excited, hadn't they? The only really serious thing was the fact that they might have missed it. They might have stubbed against it, and passed on—like idiots. She developed this fantasy with captivating grace and archness, Adair meanwhile lost in admiration, not only of the delicate fancy that kept him

smiling, but of her varying expressions so revealing of unexpected charm. She grew prettier and prettier to him—more kissable, more adorable. He kept forgetting his ulterior purpose in the rapture of being with her; he forgot his conceit, forgot his role; he was perilously near being in love. Perhaps he was in love. At any rate, when he recollected to take advantage of this unconcealed regard for him—of all this young ardor and innocent passion—the words somehow would not leave his tongue.

Her sensitive mouth, so responsive to every look of his, the sweet candor of her eyes, her transparent belief in him—all forbade. There would be time enough for that; and having made this concession to his manhood, he straightway put the idea by, dimly realizing to himself that it was unpleasant to him. It takes a bad man to appreciate and exalt the best of women; he sees her in such a contrasting light; her baser sisters give her by relief an angelic brightness. It is not for nothing that they say the reformed rake makes the best husband. Not that Adair had gone so far as this, however. He was not reformed, and cold chills would have run down his back at the horrid prospect; while his own brief career as a husband had left him with a hatred for the word and the institution. It was merely a fleeting impulse, stronger for the moment than he was, and induced by his artist love of beauty, which included this time in its comprehension, a rare, gracious and exquisite nature.

They were together for nearly two hours, and when they were forced at last to part it seemed as though only the half had been said. Yet not for an instant had they ever got near the realities. With Adair these were consciously avoided. It was one thing to say: "I love you," with mellow vibrations, and impassioned eyes; quite another to descend to the practical considerations that might reasonably be expected to follow. He felt neither in the humor to lie, nor to palter with the ugly truth, and in a sort of anger dismissed both alternatives. He was intoxicated with her; she mounted to his brain like wine; he only knew one thing, that come what might, she should never get away from him. This was all his dizzy head could hold. The future could take care of itself.

As for Phyllis she was in that rapt state of happiness when a woman can do nothing but glow and worship. Had not the king descended from his throne for her? At last was not her long heart-hunger gloriously appeased? Was she not so possessed with this demigod that all other sublunary concerns seemed to vanish into insignificance? She walked on air; she exulted in the memory of his caresses; she was the more precious to herself now that she was his, now that she belonged to him so utterly. She hoarded every compliment he had paid her; and wondered, in delicious doubt, though not altogether unconvinced, whether she could be, indeed, all that she had seemed to him. As for the deeper questions, she had the woman's faculty of answering them in formless dreams.

They were settled in a vague, tender and altogether perfect manner. He—and she—and a billowing bliss on which they floated evermore, hand pressed in hand, mouth against mouth, in an ineffable and transcendent content.

Adair, once beyond her influence, was aware of a certain sagging of that higher nature she had conjured into being. Not that he loved her any less; he was on fire for her, and his coarse passion was inflamed a thousandfold by their second meeting. But, as he said to himself, he had muffed it. He was not the first man to feel a twinge of guilt at having been *good*. He was a child of his world, of his conditions, upbringing and environment, and ought not to be blamed overmuch—rather commended for the first faint stirrings of an embryo conscience, which, if it had died all too soon, was still a spark of grace.

The performance tired him more than usual. He was slack, and could not get into his part. As a consequence, to offset his disinclination, he overplayed, and left the theater thoroughly exasperated, and out of heart. He took supper moodily by himself, and though ordinarily abstemious—for no one with his complexion could be accused of habitual excess—he drank high-ball after high-ball with a brutal satisfaction in fuddling himself. He grew wickeder with every gulp, more cold-blooded and determined. He would see this thing through, by God. He would take her with him on the road. She was ripe for it; she was crazy about him—lady and all, there was the devil in her all right. The nicest women were the worst when they let themselves go. What a fool he had been ever to bother with the other kind. He had always been a cheap fellow, pleased with cheap things—with raddled actresses, and silly tiresome shop-girls. Here was a little piece that put them all in the shade; prettier than the prettiest, dewy fresh, with a twist to everything she said so that it was an endless pleasure to be with her. She was so quick, so daintily impudent, so finely bred and educated. God, what an armful! God, what a little mistress for a tired and lonely man, sick to death of common women!

He reeled up-stairs, half drunk, and sought his room, to sleep the sleep of perfect health and perfect digestion. Whatever else Adair was, he was a sound and vigorous human animal, with a constitution of iron. No dreams disturbed his repose—no spectral finger of remorse pointed at him. A child could not have lain more peacefully on its cot than he.

It will be asked why he could not have married Phyllis properly and honestly? Apart from other considerations was she not the only daughter of a millionaire father? How did Adair come to overlook this very obvious advantage, and embark instead on all the troubles and vexations attending an illicit connection? To answer this question it is necessary to go back four or five years, and rake up his marriage with Ruby Raeburn, the dancer. She, too, had been the daughter of a rich man—Laidlaw Wright, the Michigan lumber king. Adair had

thought he was doing a very good thing for himself. To have a father-in-law who is a "lumber king" has a pleasant sound. Without knowing exactly how it was to happen, he looked forward confidently to a flow of dollars in his direction, either in cash, or vicariously in royal "tips." Surely a lumber king would take care of his own—and of his own's husband. Ruby herself had not been above reproach in holding out the bait, and everybody had congratulated him, or sneered at him for "marrying money." Alas, for the disillusion that followed. Laidlaw Wright was the hardest-fisted man on the Lakes, and no bulldog, guarding a lunch basket, could have shown more formidable fangs than he at any hand slipping towards his money-bags. Adair learned the sad truth that when you possess the millionaire's daughter, it does not necessarily follow that you possess the millionaire. His dead body must too often be crossed first—and this event, however desirable, can not be unduly hurried.

And meanness was not the only drawback to Laidlaw Wright's character. He could spend money as viciously as he withheld it, and make of it a whip of scorpions for the scourging of sons-in-law. When Adair's domestic unhappiness reached the acute stage, the cantankerous old fellow jumped into the ring, snorting battle and destruction. Money was poured out like water; giants of the bar were retained at enormous fees; detective bureaus' worked night and day. Adair was shadowed; his door was burst open at a time of all others when he would have much preferred to have it stay shut; statutes of which he had never dreamed, lying hidden and unrepealed in the dark recesses of the law, were evoked against him with startling effect. He was sent to prison in default of the bail he could not give. Then after eighteen weary days, which the giants of the bar would willingly have made eighteen months, he was tried, and his case dismissed. But as he left the court room he was again arrested. That implacable old man, with his cohorts of lawyers and detectives, had furbished up fresh charges. The indictment was a mile long. Again there was bail, default, and gnashing of teeth in a stinking cell. Of course, he had legal remedies, but these involved legal tender. He had spent his last dollar; legal remedies had to be paid for, and he had nothing to pay with. A wealthy and vindictive man, if he choose to do so, and does not grudge the outlay, can make our judicial machinery into a most serviceable steam-roller.

After the divorce, when all seemed settled and done with, there were alimony bomb-shells to be contended with. This tribute on his son-in-law's freedom became the obsessing prepossession of Laidlaw Wright's life. He subordinated the lumber business to collecting this forty-five dollars a week, until it became Adair's fixed and unalterable purpose to escape payment by every means in his power. North or South, East or West, the battle went on. Injunctions, contempt proceedings, printed forms in immense envelopes, beginning with the familiar phrase: "You are cited to appear before Judge So-and-So to show cause why

that you, etc., etc.”—rained on Adair’s head wherever Saturday night might find it. Incidentally eyes were blackened; blood streamed on box-office floors; banded functionaries and limping attorneys cried for vengeance in shabby court rooms—and not only cried, but often got it, in a heaping measure. And afar, the lumber king, like a horrible spider whose net covered the country from sea to sea, kept the wires busy and hot with hate.

When Ruby was killed in what was called “the hansom cab mystery”—an ugly affair that was never really cleared up—the old man probably mourned less for her than for the loss of his cheerless hobby—the persecution of Cyril Adair. However wealthy you are, you can not move the legal steam-roller without at least a pretense of justification; and now the justification lay with Ruby Raeburn in the grave, as stilled as her dancing feet, as finished and done with as the life that had gone out so tragically.

It had all left Adair with a profound hatred of marriage, and a still profounder hatred of rich fathers-in-law. The one suggested jail, mortification, alimony, raided box-offices, large and determined individuals bursting in your doors; the other an unrelenting monster, pitiless and crafty, trailing after you night and day, like a bloodhound. There was no glamour to Adair in Robert Ladd’s millions, but rather a sinister and awful significance; and as for marrying Phyllis, and putting his head again in that noose—who that had been in hell ever willingly went back to it? The very thought made him shudder. He might be weak and impulsive, and easily swept off his feet by her damned beauty—but he wasn’t as weak and impulsive as *that!*

## CHAPTER XIII

As had been previously arranged he met her the next day at the same place. He had come in a closed cab, which he had left a couple of blocks away, and he insisted on their returning to it, and having out their talk in its shelter. Phyllis demurred at first; it wore an unpleasant look to her; it was not fear exactly—she trusted Adair too absolutely for that—but rather a disinclination in which good taste played the bigger part. It seemed to her low, and discreditable, and unworthy. Her love was too fine a thing, and too dear to her, to have it associated with dingy cushions, a dirty floor carpet, and the vulgarizing secrecy of that shabby interior. It took some persuasion to get her to consent; and though she did

so at last under the spell of that irresistible voice, it was with a sudden quenching of the brightness that had illumined her heart.

But it never occurred to her to think the worse of Adair. A man could not be expected to have the sensitiveness of a woman. His love was like himself, robust and masterful; he fastened a string to your little collar, and dragged you after him with a splendid insouciance. Every one of your four little paws might be holding back; you might be whimpering most pitifully, but if he wanted a closed cab, in you had to go, whether you liked it or not. Not that you would have had him different; it was sweet to submit; and if he were big, and direct, and unshakable—so, too, was his love.

They drove slowly through the suburban streets, locked in each other's arms. He kissed her back to happiness, to rapture, the discreet twilight screening them in its shadow. Her qualms disappeared, her reluctance, her shrinkings from the ugliness and commonness of that horrid old box. Nothing mattered so long as they could be together, and in her exaltation she even suffered some pangs of remorse for having resisted his pleadings at all.—She had never cared for children, but as her arms were clasped about his neck, she felt a welling tenderness for him that opened her understanding to the love of a mother for her babe—the divine compassion, the exquisite desire to protect and shield, the willingness, if need be, to die herself rather than to have it suffer the least of harm. She whispered this to him in words so sincere and moving, with eyes so moist, and lips so quivering, and her whole young face so glorified by the shining soul within, that Adair would have been less than human had he not succumbed.

He was abashed; his carefully rehearsed plans were glad to creep out of sight and hide; it would have needed very little for him to fall on his knees, penitent and ashamed, and blurt out—not the truth; the truth wasn't tellable—but enough to make him seem less of a beast to himself, less of a hypocrite and villain. But he paused midway; and the impulse, which, if he had allowed it to control him might have carried him into unsuspected regions of honor and manliness, died still-born; and left him—if not exactly what he had been—at least not so very much the better.

With everything so favorable to his purpose, it continued to be a mystery to him that he still held back. This backwardness, this fear, was a new sensation. He had won prettier women in his day, and had won them briskly and straightforwardly, move by move, with cool premeditation.

Why should he falter at this one, like a ninny? What was it about her that checked and daunted him? She had flung herself at him; she had neither the will nor the knowledge to protect herself; she was as innocent as a child, and had delivered herself over to him as guilelessly. But it was not her innocence that stood in his way; he had no such scruples about innocence; innocence, if

anything, ought to have whetted the pursuit. It was something subtler than that—this withholding force. It was more as though she were some proud young queen who had been craftily made drunk with drugs, and then had been abandoned in her helplessness to become the sport of a passing soldier.... How surprised Adair would have been had he been told that the love always on his lips, profaned with every breath he drew, a lie in every sense save the very lowest, was, in all good earnest, stealthily making entry in his heart!

Making? Why, it had been there from the first, all unknown to him. But like many a man the devious road seemed to him the straighter; it was the one he meant to follow, anyhow, lead where it might; he would overcome this strange squeamishness that annoyed and bewildered him. What an ass he was! He remembered his first deer, and how the rifle had shaken in his hands—how his teeth had chattered—how it had calmly walked past him, not twelve yards away, and disappeared unscathed. The boys had called it "buck fever," and had guyed him. Hell, this was a kind of buck fever, too, though without the excuse of inexperience ... but still there was no sense in hurrying matters. There was plenty of time, old fellow, plenty of time.

Thus the day lingered out in talk and vows and kisses, with nothing achieved in any direction, and the situation apparently unchanged. Love has a wonderful power of floating on without ever touching the banks of reality! And when one of the lovers keeps the bark deliberately in mid-stream, and the other poor lunatic is so lost in ecstasy that her understanding is in the skies—hours can pass like minutes, and darkness descend all unawares.

Again they kissed and parted, and Phyllis returned home in the sweet weariness of one who has drunk deep of the cup of love. No unanswered questions fretted her, no disturbing thoughts of why he had been silent on the most important thing of all. She was young, fresh, pretty, well-born and rich—why then should she doubt? What, to a little milliner, would have been the inevitable and all-engrossing conjecture, troubled her not a bit. Men had been proposing to her for two years; love out of wedlock, while it might be familiar in books, was inconceivably remote to her; marriage was like breathing; it was one of the great unconsidered facts of life; one loved—one married.

Her preoccupation was rather with closer and dearer things—the varying expressions of that fine and intensely alive face; the mouth with its ever changing charm; that, smiling, could lift one to paradise, that, laughing, seemed to gladden the whole world; the eyes so lustrous, so melting, and yet that at a word could turn so fierce; the wavy hair that was such a joy to her to caress; the broad shoulders that had pillowed her girlish head, and had given her such a comforting sense of vigor and strength—all her own by the divinest of divine rights. Womanlike, she was trying to merge herself in the man she loved; to subordinate her

own individuality in his; to become, if she could, a slim, small, dainty counterpart of this God-given creature who had stooped to her from high Heaven itself.

She ate a good dinner and enjoyed it; drank a glass of claret with a connoisseur-like satisfaction in its fine bouquet; for she came of a stock with a royal taste for pleasure, in little things as well as big. If her father appeared somewhat constrained, and more grave and silent than was his wont, she ascribed it to nothing more than a hard day at the office; and exerted herself with all her superabundant good humor to amuse and distract him. But for once she was unsuccessful, and as the meal proceeded his brown study increased. After dinner, as usual when they were alone, they went up to his "den," the custom being for him to smoke a cigar while she glanced over the evening papers, and read to him what seemed to be of interest. As she stood leaning negligently against the mantelpiece she was surprised to notice that he did not settle himself in his usual chair. He came up to her instead, and she felt a sudden knocking at the heart as her uplifted eyes met his.

"How long has this been going on?" he demanded in a low voice.

"What do you mean, Papa?"

He paused as though to control himself.—She knew very well what he meant, and shivers ran down her back.

"Your carrying on with this actor fellow. This—this Adair." He snapped out the name as though it tasted bitter on his lips—spat it—his gray mustache bristling.

She was panic-stricken; her knees weakened beneath her; she had only presence of mind enough to tell herself that lies could not help her. But lies or not, at that moment she could not have uttered a word. It was all she could do to hold to the mantel for support.

Mr. Ladd drew out his pocket-book, and from it a letter.

"A man like that always has some female consort," he went on brutally, "some woman of his own class who follows his shabby fortunes, and considers him for the time being as her especial property; and who protects herself when that property is in danger by ways that suggest themselves to vulgar and common minds. At least, I do not consider it an unjust inference that this anonymous letter—"

Phyllis uttered a little cry, and hid her face in her hands.—So that was what it was?—She ought to have suspected it. But even in her shame a dart of jealousy passed through her heart. Who was this woman who was trying to rob her of Adair?

"It is a typical letter of the kind," continued Mr. Ladd, with grim persistence, "and written in a hand supposed to be disguised, as though anything could disguise the greater matter of the writer's innate vileness and swinishness. It starts with the usual pretense of good will, of friendly warning; and then passes, with

hardly a transition, to charges that in a police court would entail its being cleared of any women amongst the spectators. Frankly, Phyllis, it is abominable—though I am going to read it to you, not with the idea of causing you pain, of punishing you, but to show you much better than any words of mine could do, the sort of cattle you are getting mixed up with. One judges men by the company they keep; whoever this woman is, it may be presumed she knows Adair well, and is a friend of his; otherwise what could prompt all this venom? The letter is a mass of lies, but it has a side-light value on this man you're letting fool you. They are a squalid, contemptible crew, and all tarred with the same stick."

He stopped to put his glasses on his nose; and smoothing out the letter, began deliberately to read it: "'You ought to know the goings-on of that girl of yours, and if nobody else is enough your friend to tell you, I—'"

But Phyllis cried out before he could proceed further.

"Oh, Papa," she exclaimed in passionate entreaty, "don't, don't! You mustn't! You're degrading me! I—I can't stand it!"

"You know my reasons for wanting you to hear it," he said coldly.

"And you are going to force me to?"

"Yes, I am—for your own good, Phyllis."

As their eyes met something within her seemed to break. In all her life her father had been everything that was kind and gentle and indulgent. His arms had ever been her refuge; she had cried out her baby sorrows on his shoulder; how often, in contrast to other girls, she had thought herself the most fortunate of women to have such a father. Now, in her direst need he was pitiless and inflexible. He was determined to humiliate her with that horrible letter—for his manner, everything, said that it was horrible. To gain his point he was willing to sweep away the fabric of all these years. Oh, the stupidity of it, the cruelty! Nothing could ever be the same again between them after that. He could degrade her, but it would cost him every iota of her love.

Her bosom swelled. Her anger was at so white a heat that she no longer felt the fears and shrinkings that had at first assailed her; her heart beat high, but to another and a fiercer measure.

What a moment for him to begin again: "'You ought to know the goings-on of that girl of yours, and if nobody else—'"

"Papa, *Papa!*"

"My dear, you must not interrupt me. I insist on—"

"Then let me read it to myself."

He paused, looking at her in indecision; and from her to the coals in the grate. She perceived the meaning of his hesitation, and laughed scornfully.

"Oh, you can trust me," she said, holding out her hand. "Do you want my word, or what? I won't destroy it. Rest assured I shall give you the pleasure of

knowing I am reading every word of it.”

He resigned it to her, tugging at his mustache, and watching her covertly as she moved nearer the light and began to read. He marveled at her composure, her decision. She was not evading the ugly task—her eyes moved too slowly for that, and her face reflected too clearly the unsparing comments on her behavior.

It was coarse beyond belief. Only a man half out of his wits could have allowed any woman of his family to read such a thing. Many of the expressions she had never heard before, but it is a peculiarity of gross Anglo-Saxon to be readily understood. Nothing was lost on Phyllis, either in the description of the man she loved, or the accusations of the vilest kind leveled at herself. It was an infamous production, soiling and disgusting, nakedly spiteful, and nakedly pornographic.

She perused it unflinchingly to the end; studied the signature, “One who knows,” and handed it back to her father.

“I thought people were put in prison for writing such letters,” she said in an even voice.

“So they are,” he returned curtly, “though that isn’t quite the point.”

“What is the point?”

“To know how much of it is true.”

Again her composure startled him. “Is it possible you believe any of it?” she asked.

“Yes, I do,” he said.—He was holding the letter in his hand, like a lawyer in court, cross-examining a witness. He was determined to get at the bottom of all this.

“Is it true you went to the theater twice?”

“As a spectator—yes.”

“Is it true that you wrote a letter to him?”

“Yes.”

“Is it true you invited him here?”

“Yes, he came once.”

“And it’s true you met him afterwards on one of the streets in the Richmond district?”

“Yes.”

“It’s true you let him kiss you there before everybody—embrace you—hug you like a silly servant-girl?”

She ignored the insult, and answered imperturbably: “It was a deserted place; I didn’t know any one was spying on us.”

“And it’s true to-day you met him again?”

“Yes.”

“And drove together in a closed cab?”

"Yes."

"Now, Phyllis, my girl, on your honor; I am asking you this as your father; I have the right to ask it, and the right to a sacredly truthful answer—the affair has gone no further than this?"

"No."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

"And all the rest of it?"—He touched the letter.

"Lies, Papa—revolting, hideous lies."

He stumbled towards his chair; seated himself in it; reached for the cigar-box. He had expected a scene; he had expected tears, pleading, and repentance. He had a penetrating sense of having mismanaged everything. Perhaps he ought not to have shown her that letter. It had shocked her through and through, but not in the way he had intended. He had meant it to be like a surgeon's knife—one sure swift stroke, and she was to rise cured, disillusioned. The effect had been disconcertingly different; he had affronted her to the quick, he had roused a defiance all the more to be feared because it was cool, subdued, controlled—the kind that is apt to last.—He lit his cigar, and blew out breath after breath of smoke. He must not make another mistake. He would think a little while before he began again.

She glided slowly towards the door, but with an air so unconcerned, so free from any suggestion of flight, that he suspected nothing. The fact of her leaving the door ajar seemed to imply an immediate return. Several minutes passed before he suddenly became uneasy. So peremptory was his conviction that she was near that he cried: "Phyllis, Phyllis," before rising to find out what had become of her. But she was not in the corridor outside. He sought her boudoir—nor was she here either. Her bedroom off it? It was empty, too. Thoroughly alarmed, he descended the stairs, softly calling out, "Phyllis, Phyllis!" He was answered by a servant's voice below: "Is it you, Sir?"

"Yes, Henry, I am looking for Miss Phyllis?"

"She went out a minute ago, Sir."

"Went out?"

"Yes, Sir."

Good God, she was gone!

## CHAPTER XIV

Once outside the door, she had raced downstairs like the wind, put on her hat anyhow, and sped into the darkness, without waiting for wrap or gloves. Her first idea had been to reach the theater, but as she turned down side streets in order to evade pursuit and get the Fairmount Avenue car line, she realized that this involved too much time. Her watch, hastily looked at under a lamp, showed that it was after eight o'clock, and that she could not hope to gain the theater before the first act began. She decided to telephone instead, and accordingly, walking very fast, and sometimes running until a pain in her side forced her to desist, she made her way to Fairmount Avenue, and to a drug-store she knew to be there. It was the matter of a moment to look up the number of the Thalia Theater, unhook the receiver, and get central.

"Nick-el," murmured that impersonal arbiter of human destinies.

"I don't understand—please give me my number, I'm in such a hurry."

"Nick-el!"

"Drop a nickel in the slot, Miss," said the clerk helpfully.

She had come away without her purse. She hadn't a penny!

As quick as thought she pulled off one of her rings, and laid it on the counter.

"I have forgotten my purse," she said. "Please let me have a quarter, and I'll redeem the ring to-morrow."

She had been resourceful enough to recollect she needed more than a nickel—there was the trolley fare to the theater and back.

The clerk took the ring with no great willingness; examined it with every apparent intention of denying her request; then examined her with the same sharp look. The horrid creature recognized her, and his manner changed to a cringing deference. "Oh, Miss Ladd, I beg your pardon, I didn't know it was you, Miss Ladd. A quarter? Why certainly, Miss Ladd. Only too happy to oblige you, Miss Ladd. Take back your ring, and pay any time at your convenience, Miss Ladd." He rang open his cash register, and passed her three nickels and a dime, together with the ring. "Put it back where it belongs," he said, smirking and rubbing his hands. "My, what would the boss say to me if I told him I had kept Miss Phyllis Ladd's ring!"

She thanked him, and again gave the number at the telephone, dropping in the nickel that had cost her so much. The clerk, though he had moved away, was all eyes and ears, and she had an unpleasant sensation of being watched. But it was too late to draw back now. Her need was too urgent, too desperate for such irritating trifles to deter her from her purpose. The horrid creature would stare. Well, let him stare! He would chatter about it, too, of course. Well, let him chatter!

"Thalia Theater—box-office."

"I want to speak to Mr. Adair at once."

"It's impossible—he's in his dressing-room, and we ring up in eight minutes."

"I simply have to speak to him."

"Can't do it—it's against the rules."

"Oh, you must, you simply must!"

"Who are you?"

"Miss Ladd!"

"Who did you say?"

"Miss Ladd—L-A-D-D."

"What is it, please, that you want to see Mr. Adair about?"

"Something very important."

"I'm sorry, but I can't do it."

"No, no, please. Mr. Adair will never forgive you if you don't." Then she had an inspiration. Where or how she had learned the name she hardly knew, but it flashed across her mind at this moment. "Is Mr. Merguelis there?"

"I am Mr. Merguelis."

"Mr. Tom Merguelis?"

"Yes."

"Then you might know who I am. Mr. Adair—"

"Oh, say, yes—you're not the little lady that he—"

"Yes, that's me."

"But, my dear, he's in his dressing-room, and that's on the level."

"I simply must talk to him for a second, and you must go and get him."

"Hello, hello—is that you? Hello—yes, my dear, I'm sending for him. Please hold the line."

What an age it seemed, standing there with the receiver to her ear, and her heart bursting with impatience. Meaningless scraps of talk strained her attention; when these stopped she was in terror lest she had been cut off; at last there was the peculiar jarring and disturbance that showed someone getting into touch at the other end, followed by Adair's strong clear challenge.

"Who wants Mr. Adair?"

"I do—it's Phyllis."

"Oh, my little girl, I'm in a frightful rush. Hurry up, tell me what's the matter?"

"I want to see you as soon as I can—something awful has happened."

"What?"

"I can't tell you here—but can't you guess?"

"Trouble at home?"

"Yes."

"Found out?"

"Yes."

"Your father?"

"Yes."

Adair paused. Events were moving faster than he had anticipated. He was both thrilled and bewildered at the suddenness of it all.

"It's risky," he said, in a voice that shook a little, "but you'll have to come up and see me here—there's nothing else for it."

"That's what I want to do," she answered.

"I'll fix it up with the door-keeper to take you to my dressing-room. Just say you have an appointment with me, and he'll understand. Wait there for me until the first act is over—will you?"

"Yes, Cyril."

"And you will excuse me if I run? They'll have to hold the curtain as it is."

"Yes, yes—and I'll be there."

"Au revoir, sweetheart!"

"Good-by—I won't be long."

The stage-door, like most stage-doors, was to be found in a cut-throat alley, so dark, dangerous, and forbidding in its aspect that it took all of Phyllis' courage to enter it. A ratty-looking individual, so compactly built into the entrance that he could open the door by a shove of his boot, exerted this labor-saving device in answer to her knock, and glowered at her from over the paper he was reading.

"What do you want?" demanded the ratty individual.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Adair."

He rose without a word; and leading her up some steps, guided her inside the theater. In the twilight of the wings were some stage-hands in overalls; an actor whom she recognized as the wicked prince, sitting on a soap-box, waiting listlessly for his cue; from the stage itself came the sound of voices raised to an unreal pitch, and strangely exciting and fantastic, in a cadence that was neither recitative nor speech. She could not help noticing, even in her agitation, the shabby, dilapidated, disorderly appearance of everything—the ropes, the dusty props, the frayed material of the scenes, the general air of comfortlessness—receiving the shock that comes to every one on first seeing the theater from the wrong side. But the ratty individual gave her no time to take more than a passing glance, leading the way with whispered warnings through a gorge of canvas, and down a twisting iron stair to the dressing-rooms below. He stopped at one of the little cabin-like doors, opened it, and ushered her in. Then he left her, and shuffled away with diminishing footfalls.

The dressing-room was bald, bare, uncarpeted, and painted a staring white. Below a mirror flanked by two flaring gas-jets there ran a sort of shelf on which were grease-paints, crayons, brushes, a pot of cold-cream, a pot of rouge, and other necessaries for "making up." From nails on the wall—common, every-day nails—there straggled an untidy line of men's clothes. On a box in the corner was a wash-basin, pitcher, soap, and a towel that was none too clean. Three empty chairs, and a wall decoration completed the picture. The wall decoration was a printed notice, in large and emphatic letters: "Smoking positively prohibited in this theater. Ladies must not use alcohol curling-irons."

Most young women, in a situation so equivocal and so unfamiliar, would have been ill at ease, frightened, apprehensive of many vague and dimly suspected dangers. But Phyllis' faith in Adair had none of this faltering quality. She loved, and loving she trusted. Her tremors had ended the moment the door had closed her in—the moment, in fact, when the others would have trembled most. To her, on the contrary, the little room breathed security for the very reason that it was Adair's. With adorable folly she pressed kisses on all his outstretched possessions; nuzzled her cheek against his coat; put her little foot beside one of his big man's shoes, delighting in the contrast—and altogether felt greatly comforted and refreshed.

After a while she heard a tremendous commotion overhead that swelled, sank and swelled again as the house broke into applause at the end of the act. There was a lumbering, scratchy, pattering sound as of a dozen pianos being moved at once by stalwart men in slippers—it was the new scene being set. The passageway outside, previously so still, resounded with a rush of feet—with exclamations and laughter as the company scudded to make their respective changes. The door was flung open, and there, brisk and smiling, on the threshold stood Corrèze!

Phyllis ran to his arms, and hiding her face against him began to cry. She was so happy, so wretched; the misery of that last hour had tried her more than she knew; her joy at seeing Adair seemed to exhaust the little strength she had left, and her conflicting emotions could find vent only in tears. How sweet it was to be petted, to be soothed—to feel so small, and weak, and helpless in that powerful clasp! Her tears flowed afresh. Flowed at the thought of her love for him, of his love for her, at the beauty, wonder, and solace of it all. Nothing could ever harm them as long as they had each other, nothing, nothing.

She made him take a chair, and seating herself at his feet crossed her arms on his knees and looked up at him. In this position it seemed easier to confide, easier to answer his persistent questions, easier at the same time to satisfy her craving to nestle close. As Adair heard of the letter he turned as black as a thunder-cloud and his hands clenched.

"I know whom I've to thank for that!" he exclaimed furiously. "The damned little treacherous hound, I could choke her for it! I've seen something working in her eyes all along, but I never dreamed she could be as low and contemptible as that! And so she was keeping tab on us, was she, with all her mean little eyes and ears, the dyed toad!"

"Cyril, you really know who it is?"

He made a hissing sound—a disgusted assent. "She isn't twenty feet from here," he exclaimed, "unless she is at the key-hole this moment." He rose; stepped to the door, and looked out. "Not here," he said.

"But tell me, is she one of the actresses in the company?"

"Never you mind," he returned roughly; and then, with a quick remorse at the look in Phyllis' face, he apologized in a roundabout fashion by denouncing the stage in general. "It's a low, dirty business," he cried, "and the people in it are a low, dirty lot; and I guess I'm not so damned much better myself; and if you had a spark of sense you'd clear out, and never see me again! Do you hear what I'm telling you, little chap? Do you hear, Phyllis girl?" He put down his hand, and caught her ear between his thumb and finger, giving it a shake. "Skin out, you darling baby. Your father's right. Go back with my compliments, and tell him I said so!"

His jeering tone hurt her; there was too much sincerity in his self-contempt, too genuine a ring to his proposed dismissal. The contradictory creature, stung to the quick by that letter, and indignantly conscious of much of its truth, was floundering towards righteousness, like a walrus after a floe. Hell, he didn't mean her any harm. Let her get out.

"You'd better hurry," he said, pinching her ear again. "I'm just a cheap actor, as common as the dirt in the road, and you're a beautiful young lady a million times too good for this kind of game. All that you can get out of it is dishonor and disgrace. Go away—let's drop it—love somebody who's worth loving."

He tried to push her from him, but she clung only the tighter, her face paling at his earnestness, and stubbornly looking up at his.

"You couldn't say that if you were—what you say you are."

"How do you know it isn't a trick!" he exclaimed, "just another move in the game—just to get you a little further out of your depth, and then drown you?" His hands closed round her neck with brutal pleasure in her youth, her softness, her delicacy, her powerlessness.

"It's strange," he said wonderingly, "but at this moment when you have never been more tempting to me, I am willing to let you go—want to let you go. It's the first good resolution in my life, yet you stick here like an infatuated little noodle, waiting for it to pass."

She struggled closer against him.

"Am I tempting?"

"My God, yes."

"And you love me?"

"Oh, my darling, I do, I do!"

"And wouldn't it be nice for a poor little lonesome cheap actor, who's really a great big splendid noble person of genius, if he only knew it—to have me to pet him and love him and adore him, and kiss away his morbid, silly moods, and make such a darling baby of him that he'd burst out crying if I were out of his sight a minute?"

He looked at her sharply for an underlying meaning—a comprehension—an assent. But her candor and innocence were transparent; the purity beneath those limpid depths shone like a diamond in a pool. Her love took no thought of anything base or wrong, either in him or in her; all she sought was the assurance that he loved her, and wanted her; and this achieved she was content to leave the rest to him with unquestioning faith. She did not come of the class to whom marriage is vividly seen as a protection, a safe-guard, a coveted lien on a pocket-book and a man, enforceable by the police; to her it was more one of those inevitable formalities that attend all the big events of life, from being born to being buried, and which one accepts as a matter of course.

Adair, in a gust of passion, caught her up on his knees, and crushed her unresisting body in his arms. Everything was forgotten in the maddening rapture of the moment. The fragrance of her young beauty over-mastered him. His head reeled in the greatest of all intoxications—the woman-drunkenness that makes men crazy. Between his clenched teeth he whispered: "You are mine, and I am going to keep you—you shall never get away now. You had your chance, but it's gone, fool that I was ever to offer it. But now I'll kill you first; do you hear, Phyllis, I'll kill you first, for you're mine, body and soul, and you've gone too far ever to draw back." His voice sank lower; he was beside himself; all he knew was that she was shaking convulsively—that her face, her lips were burning—that love, shame, devouring fever all flamed in the eyes she tried to hide from him.

A knock at the door startled him to his feet. Rap, rap, rap!

"You're called, Mr. Adair," said the voice from without.

"All right, Williams!"

His quick, matter-of-fact tone was as much a shock to Phyllis as the interruption itself. To fall from the clouds, and then land so squarely and coolly on the earth below was a performance disturbing to witness. It seemed to cast suspicion on his sincerity up above. But the misgiving was a fleeting one, for as he turned to her, she perceived in his air of concern and resolution that she was still the dominant thought in his mind.

"See here, Phyllis," he said, speaking fast, "this means only one thing. The

company leaves Saturday night after the show to jump to Ferrisburg. You must come with me—that's all there is to it.—Will you?"

She bowed her head, for somehow she could not answer in words.

"It won't do for us to see each other till then; but you ring me up on Saturday between twelve and one at the St. Charles Hotel, and we'll fix up the dates. Have you got that straight?"

She bowed her head again, more overcome than ever.

"Don't worry about a trunk, or any damned foolishness of that sort. Trunks have busted more elopements than six-shooters—just a nightie and a tooth-brush, and we'll manage the rest at Ferrisburg!" His glance sought for some evasion, some backwardness, but there was neither.

"It's the only thing to do," she said simply. "Only, only—" She was holding fast to his hand, swaying a little.

He waited for some objection; some silly, feminine obstacle—

"You do love me, don't you?" she asked as pleadingly as a child. "If you love me I could do anything. Tell me you love me, Cyril."

He kissed her hastily, saying "yes," and again "yes," and ran out of the dressing-room. A thin deferential man peeped in. "I'm Mr. Adair's dresser, Miss," he said. "He told me to show you the way out. If you would be so good as to follow me, Miss."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Good-night, Miss!"

## CHAPTER XV

In the meanwhile, Mr. Ladd, closely buttoned up and walking to keep himself warm, restlessly paced the drive-way, awaiting Phyllis' return. At every nearing footfall he would stiffen and stop, and his throat would contract with something very much like trepidation. His anger was all gone. In its place was not only contrition and self-reproach for having shown her that letter, but a very real alarm of the situation he had precipitated. He had been inconceivably stupid—inconceivably unkind and blundering. He had driven the girl straight into the fellow's arms, and had now doubled what he had to undo. Looking back on it he

seemed to have said everything he ought not to have said; done everything he ought not to have done. It was a case for frankness, tenderness, and considerate understanding. Hurry, too, in such matters, was the root of all evil. Romance, like faith, grew with persecution. Gad, if she really thought herself in love with this egregious actor, he would put his pride in his pocket, invite him to the house, pretend to like him, and thus earn the right to stipulate for conventions and a long engagement. No cruel father here, but a cool man of the world, craftily leaving it to others to tittle-tattle, to disparage, and best of all to deride with a laughter infinitely more effective than the sternest and angriest of arguments. Yes, that was the program and he must put an iron hold upon himself to see that he did not swerve from it by a hair.

He ran forward in the dark as he heard some one coming, and recognized Phyllis dimly against the lighted street behind.

"Phyllis!" he cried, "Phyllis!" and he caught her hand and held it. Her touch, even more than her silence, told him how estranged they were. His agitation paralyzed his tongue; he hardly knew how to begin; he murmured under his breath, "Forgive me, forgive me"; and then, louder, with an uncontrollable resentment that flashed up in spite of all his self-warnings: "Don't deny it—you've been to him!"

"I wasn't going to deny it, Papa."

"Where? At the theater?"

"Yes."

"You went there alone—not even a maid with you? Have you parted with all sanity?"

His tone was overbearing, harsh, scornful. Alas, for his good and wise intentions! In the impact of two stubborn natures, each rousing in the other an invincible antagonism, there could be no tenderness, no consideration. Each was fighting with the flag nailed to the mast; she for Adair, he for his daughter.

"It was your doing, Papa. I had no alternative."

"Oh, what a lie! I'd sooner have gone with you myself, however bitter or humiliating it might have been for me."

The picture of such an escort to such a rendezvous made her laugh in spite of herself. It was not the kind of laughter to soften or turn away wrath. To Ladd it seemed heartlessness itself.

"It's unbelievable," he broke out, "my God, Phyllis, what am I to say to you? Isn't the man self-condemned on the face of it—with his closed cabs, and underhanded meetings, and now stripping you of every rag of reputation by letting you come to him at his theater? And what do you mean by the theater, anyhow?—His dressing-room, of course?"

"Yes."

Her answer wrung a groan from him.

"Phyllis, Phyllis!" he exclaimed. Then in an altered voice, full of irritated reasonableness, he went on: "Do you realize that we could have had the same—well, disagreement—over that Pastor fellow you were engaged to? Wouldn't you have been just as wilful in his case—just as sure? Wouldn't it have been the same with Baron von Piller if I had objected violently at the time you engaged yourself to him? Look back on both these affairs. You aren't altogether a fool. Mayn't this be a third mistake?"

She seized his hand in both her own, and squeezed it with all her strength.

"It's because I love him *like that!* Not the love that comes of compliments, of attentions and flowers, but *that!*—But of course you don't understand—you can't."

Mr. Ladd ignored this slight on his more limited knowledge, though his lip curled sardonically under his mustache.

"I am more concerned in how he loves you," he said. "He's acting like a cad, and you know it."

"Papa!"

His voice outrang hers. "Love," he cried, with piercing contempt, "that kind of love is the commonest thing there is. There isn't a drab on the streets who hasn't tasted it to the dregs. God help you when you wake up, and see this man as he is—schemer, scoundrel, blackguard. Do you think I don't know? Do you think I haven't run across hundreds? Do you think I'm going to let an adventurer like that get his hooks into you, and drag you down into his own filthy mire? You're the only thing I have in life; I live for you; there isn't an hour of the day when you're not in my mind. You can't dismiss all this at the nod of a stranger. It carries its obligations—for you, too; the obligation of more than twenty years; not for feeding and clothing you, I don't mean anything so banal—but the deeper one of a love that has kept you warm and happy—that has grown without your knowing it to be a very part of you, as it is all of me."

Had he stopped there the harm might still have been undone. But with a perversity inexplicable at that moment when the tide had turned, and responsive tears were streaming down those girlish cheeks, he had a sudden outburst of rancor that destroyed everything he had gained.

"To think that anybody named Cyril Adair—my God, *Cyril Adair*, with its suggestion of sticky sweetness, and tinsel, and footlights, and mock heroics—could come between two sane, grown-up people like you and me!—Cyril Adair!" he repeated, and laughed mirthlessly.

There was nothing he could have urged against Adair that could have hurt her more. A young and devoted woman can always find excuses for her lover's past. It belongs to a time before her little hand had been stretched out to save him, before she had brought hope and light to one who had never known either, and

had consequently—and naturally—abandoned himself to despair. With a feeling surely divine, and often justified by results, she never doubts her ability to wash that black sheep to the fleecy whiteness of her own dainty wool. But poor Cyril's name was a very different matter; it was worse in its pinchbeck and aristocratic pretensions, and school-girl-novel picturesqueness than the most crimson of sins. It would still be stamped on the luckless sheep after he had been whitened as white as snow—the Scarlet Letter of vulgarity, so to speak—affronting good taste on every hill-side. Nothing more showed the degree of Phyllis' infatuation than that she had been able to tolerate this name; and now, to have it flung in her face, with an emphasis so sneering—the one taunt for which she had no answer—was more than she felt herself able to bear.

She drooped beside her father, realizing the futility of any further argument, and of a sudden so tired that the woes of the world seemed to be on her shoulders. Her voice, when at last she broke the silence, was weary, though with none of the weariness of surrender, but rather that of a settled and altogether sad determination.

"We seem to have said all there is to say—good night, Papa."

He would have detained her, but she moved away from him, and preceded him into the house. He followed, respecting her wish to terminate the scene. He was weary, too, and no less willing to be alone. He had to think and to act, and much had to be done that night.

They met at breakfast as usual. She kissed him dutifully, and poured out his coffee as though this Wednesday morning was no different from any other Wednesday morning. They talked on indifferent subjects until the servants had left them. Then the suspended battle was renewed.

"My dear," said Mr. Ladd, with an uncertain smile, "I am thinking of sending you on a visit to your Aunt Sarah's. It will be better for both of us to stay apart for a time, and see matters with a little more calmness and—consideration for each other. There's no sense in being over-hasty, and making momentous resolutions in this twinkling-of-an-eye sort of way. There's lots of time—oceans of time. You may change, I may change—for I don't set up to be inflexible, and neither do you. Yes, you'll go to your Aunt Sarah's, and then to Paris with her if you like, or Monte Carlo. I guess I can fix it up to the nines, even to a look-in at Paquin's, and one of those expensive strolls down the Rue de La Paix. Go ahead—why not?"

"I'd rather stay here, Papa."

"Phyllis, this is a request—a favor to me. I want you to."

"When?"

"Why not the noon train? I've taken a drawing-room for you, and a berth

for your maid—and Sarah’s expecting you.”

”You told her?”

He made no attempt to avoid the implication of her eyes.

”No,” he replied. ”No, I don’t believe in roaring out your troubles over the long distance ’phone. It was enough to call it an impulse. With you, my dear, that is always a sufficient reason.”—They both laughed, and Mr. Ladd’s anxious cordiality redoubled at so favorable a symptom. ”If it’s the real thing, Phyllis, time won’t hurt it.”

”It is the real thing, Papa.”

”But you will go?”

”No.”

”Phyllis, I insist.”

”I’m sorry, but it’s impossible.”

”You have to. You must.”

”I won’t!”

It is the terrible part of stereotyped situations that people will make use of the stereotyped expressions that go with them. Mr. Ladd was the kindest and most devoted father on earth, yet the venerable formula rose to his lips: ”You defy me under my own roof?”

It of course forced out the stereotyped reply: ”I can leave it.”

Mr. Ladd, in silence, looked at her long and steadily; then he bent his head. She saw nothing but the iron-gray hair; the stooping, dejected shoulders; the hand, lying as limp as dead, on the damask cloth.

”Papa?”

No answer.

”Papa?”

She ran to his side, all revolt gone, her only thought to comfort him. Her bare arms entwined themselves about his neck in a paroxysm of remorse; her bosom swelled; her voice was incoherent as she lavished her young tenderness upon him. It was a moment that would decide her life. Had her father left the initiative to her, had he been content to accept mutely these tokens of her surrender—he would have won, then and there, and nothing again would ever have come between them. But with blind stupidity he had to persevere with the intention their clash had interrupted.

”I will tell you my real reason for wanting you to get away,” he said. ”It wasn’t what you thought at all—it was to spare you unnecessary pain. Last night I sent Reynolds, our best secret-service man, to New York with *carte blanche* to confer with the Pinkertons and ransack this fellow’s record from top to bottom. From what Reynolds told me he already knew—I mean what’s said down-town, I believe it will be a black one, so black that there won’t be any question about

your giving him up—just on the facts brought out—facts that can not be disproved or contested. Reynolds—”

”But, Papa, I don’t understand. You are setting detectives to go back over his life, like a criminal? *Detectives?*”

”Yes.”

”But how dishonorable, how infamous!”

”Oh, it’s done every day; it’s common, my dear; if the man’s straight it can’t hurt him—but if he has anything to hide, why, we turn on the search-light, and find out what’s wrong.—It’s all done secretly; he won’t know; don’t worry about that.—I expect a full report in a few days, and would rather not have you here when I get it.”

”And do you think that’s fair or right, or anything but—fiendish?”

”How do you know he isn’t married, Phyllis?”—he shot this at her mercilessly. ”How do you know anything except what he’s told you? You may be willing to believe him, and all that—but I’m your father, and I want to *know*, and by God, I’m going to know!”

”Papa, don’t!”

”Aha, you’re not very confident, are you?”

”He’s a man. I don’t doubt he’s been foolish, and bad, and fast, but to see it written down cold-bloodedly on sheets of paper is more than I can bear. I am willing to ignore that; I am willing to take him as he is *now*. Oh, Papa, a woman can forgive so much.”

”Yes, my dear, and a great deal that a father never could.”

”I beg you, Papa, I implore you to telegraph to them to stop.”

”It’s too late—besides it has to be done; I insist on it; I’m going to strip that man’s past to the bone.”

”Even if it costs you me? Even if this is the end of everything between us?”

”Fiddle-de-dee, these theatrics are unworthy of you! You’re going to take the noon train to Sarah’s, and behave yourself; and this business, however disagreeable to both of us, has got to go through.”

Her lips tightened mutinously. She was not a young woman who could be driven.

”I’ll stay here, or walk right out of your house—and you know where.”

”Then stay,” he cried, rising wrathfully, ”and may God forgive you for the misery you are bringing down on me. I’m only trying to do what’s best, and you treat me as though I was one of that fellow’s cruel parents on the stage! It’s no time to mince matters, and I tell you straight out, Phyllis, he’s a blackguard and a scoundrel, and when you see the Pinkertons’ report, I guess you’ll go down on your knees and beg my pardon for your heartlessness and obstinacy.”

He glared at her, expecting a retort that would add fresh fuel to his anger,

but she was silent, downcast, trembling. The answer she made was to herself, inaudible save to her anguished soul: "Oh, that Saturday night were here!"

## CHAPTER XVI

The four days that followed were almost unendurable in the strain they entailed. Phyllis was heavy with her secret; beset by emotions so conflicting that they seemed to rend her to pieces; forlorn and desolate under her father's studied coldness. The detectives' report did not come, or was withheld perhaps,—but the apprehension of it was always hanging horribly above her head. It was not the facts themselves she feared most, though she dreaded them, too; it was to hear them tauntingly on her father's lips; to be forced to stand, and listen, and cringe at what the human ferrets had unearthed.—Anxious days; leaden days; sad, introspective, interminable days, never to be recalled in after life without a peculiar depression.

On Saturday, at the stroke of noon, she was in a telephone booth, with shivers cascading down her back, and the eagerest heart in Carthage thumping under her breast. In the time she took to get her number, she had decided to go, not to go—then again to go, then again not to go. It was awful, and she couldn't; it was awful, and she would!

"Hello, is that the St. Charles Hotel?"

"Yes, Chincholchell, whodyerwant?"

"Mr. Cyril Adair?"

"Hold the line."

He must have been waiting there for his voice answered immediately, abrupt and deep: "Hello, is that you?"

"Yes,—you know who."

"Is it all right—you are coming?"

"If you want me to."

His only answer to that was a laugh that shook the wire. How manly and confident it sounded in contrast to her own quavering whisper!

"Now, listen, you darling baby, and get this right. We're to pick up the Alleghany local at ten minutes past midnight, and at half-past eleven I'll have

Tom Merguelis waiting for you in a cab, across the Avenue on the southeastern corner. Can you manage to get out of the house, do you think?"

"Oh, yes."

"No trunk, you know—just the few things you need, and the fewer the better."

"I understand."

"Find Tom—that's all you have to do—and the rest is for him."

"Yes, Cyril."

"Say it as though you meant it! I'd rather have you back out now than fail me at the last moment. That's an awful faint 'yes.'"

"Don't blame me if I'm scared—you'd be scared too, in my place."

"Well, how scared are you going to be at half-past eleven—that's the real point of it?"

"Cyril, dearest?"

"Yes, my darling."

"I'm coming, I want to come, I'm crazy to come—and you mustn't think for a single moment that I won't."

"That's the way to talk!"

"And you'll be good to me, won't you?"

"My precious!"

"And love me, oh, so well?"

"Yes, yes!"

"And I'll try to be the best little wife that ever made a man warm, and comfortable, and happy—and I'm going to keep your heart-buttons sewed on as well as the others—and darn your beautiful big soul with girl-silk—and dress you every day in a lovely new suit of kisses, so that people will turn round on the street, and ask who's your tailor! And Cyril?"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"I'm the happiest girl in the world, and the luckiest! And I'm not scared a bit, and I'll be there at half-past eleven, and I love you, and I'm going to run away with you; and I'm glad I'm going to run away with you, and I'm twenty-one, and my own mistress, and as bold as brass, and six policemen couldn't stop me, and I'm just a little slave panting for her master, and I've gnawed the ropes through with my teeth, and no one shall ever tie me up again, or keep me away from you, Amen!"

Again there was that manly, confident laugh.

"I think that little slave had better run home again and pretend to tie up," he said. "It would spoil everything if your father got wind of this—I know those rich old fellows—they can be a power for mischief whether the law is on their side or not. Good-by, my darling, take care of yourself, and look out for Tommy

at eleven thirty. Good-by!”

”I hope we will never say that word to each other again,” exclaimed Phyllis. ”It’s a horrid word and I hate it. Good-by, Cyril, and don’t forget your little slave, counting the minutes at home!”

”Ta, ta, my lamb, I won’t forget her. Couldn’t if I would, ta, ta!”

There is no harder task than to fold one’s hands and wait. Adair had his matinée and his evening performance to engross his thoughts, and allay to some degree his fever of anticipation. But Phyllis had no such resource. Restless, nervous, on edge with suspense—fits of joy alternating with craven terror—she wore out the longest afternoon of her life, and an evening that was more trying still. Her father, to make matters worse, attempted some advances; spoke to her with unexpected kindness; hovered on the brink of another appeal. What a little Judas she felt, sitting opposite him for perhaps the last time, and maintaining a constraint that was, indeed, her armor, for if she responded at all she knew she would never go that night. So she parried and fenced, and kept the conversation impersonal at any hazard, while his face grew steadily more overcast, and the lines of his forehead deepened. She excused herself early, pleading fatigue, and relaxed her attitude to kiss him tenderly good night.

”It’ll all come right before long,” she murmured softly. ”Good night, my darling daddy, and remember I love you whatever happens.”

She was off before he could take advantage of a mood so melting. But he felt much consoled, nevertheless.

”She’s coming round,” he said to himself. ”I might have known she would. That’s the comfort of her being such a good girl, and so intelligent!”

Up-stairs, the young lady thus complacently described was stripping off her dinner gown, and wondering what dress she would replace it with. She was the daintiest of soubrettes in her long dark-red silk stockings, and Watch, her Russian poodle, gazed at her with an approving, first-row-of-the-orchestra expression that made him look too wicked and dissipated for anything. She gave him a gentle kick on the nose to remind him that staring wasn’t gentlemanly, and finally chose a blue tailor-made by Redfern. When this was on, the rest of her preparations were easy. She could not well take Watch, so she took his collar, and this was the first to go into the little hand-bag. A nightgown followed, a pair of stockings, tooth-brush, comb and brush, tooth-powder, some handkerchiefs, the photographs of her father and mother, still in their frames, and a pair of patent leather slippers with gilt buckles. Surely no little bride of her importance and social position had ever set forth with so slender a trousseau. There it all was, dog-collar below, slippers on top, in a bag no bigger than an exaggerated purse. She smiled a little tremulously as she looked at it, touched as only a woman could be by the magnitude of her sacrifice. Her clothes and her father—tears for both,

thus equally abandoned, suffused her eyes.

The next thing was a note of farewell, to be found the following morning on her unused pillow. "I am going away with Mr. Adair," she wrote, "taking my own life in my own hands for better or worse. Whether we are to be friends—you and I—depends entirely upon yourself, although alienation from you will be very hard for me to bear. Forgive me if you can, and do not let your disappointment and chagrin embitter you against me; or what would hurt me almost as much—against him. To-night when I kissed you it was good-by, and if it is for ever it will be your own fault, and very, very cruel, for I love you, dearest father, I love you. Ever your devoted Phyllis."

By half-past nine everything was ready; and it was with a consuming impatience that she went into her boudoir with Watch, and ensconced herself on the sofa to wait. A confidential Russian poodle can be of great help to a young lady in distress. Watch's sympathy; Watch's certainty of everything coming out right; Watch's implied determination to soften the blow to Mr. Ladd; Watch's willingness to whine over the general tragedy of things—all were whimsically comforting. Best of all, he could listen for ever and ever with one ear cocked up, and never lose for an instant his air of highly gratified interest. And what didn't he hear during that hour and three quarters on the sofa! What secrets of longing and tenderness, of girlish hopes, of girlish dreams, of delicious falterings and trepidations—all breathed into that woolly ear!

Then came the suffocating moment of departure—the quieting of an unruly friend—the peeping from the door; the tip-toeing down the stairs; the panicky stops to cower and listen; the stealthy passage of the great dim hall; the groping for bolts and chains; the heavy door swinging heavily back; the cold, dark, starry night beyond; the egress into it; the wild sense of escape and freedom; the sound of gravel under the eager little feet; the gate-way; the wide silent Avenue; the glimmering lights of the cab at the farther corner; and—

"Yes, I'm Tom Merguelis, Miss. Jump in—everything is ready."

She discovered herself sitting beside a very tall, very thin young man, who smiled down at her in a quizzical, friendly manner not unsuggestive of the Cheshire Cat. That vague, deprecatory grin was as much a part of Mr. Merguelis as his sandy hair, his retreating chin, and the whole amiable vacancy of his expression. His youth had been passed before the public as "assistant" to Professor Theophilus Blitz, the exhibiting hypnotist, who was accustomed nightly to run pins into him; make him drink kerosene under the impression it was beer; smack his lips over furniture-polish; eat potato peelings for sausages; bark like a dog, meow like a cat, make love to a bolster, and generally disport himself to the astonishment and horror of clodhopper audiences. Six years of this had left Tommy without a digestion, and that fixed and bewildered grin, which to Phyllis, under

the unusual circumstances of their meeting, seemed to her not without a satiric quality.

But as they drove through the deserted streets she realized her mistake, and corrected so unjust a first impression. The artless, gawky creature idolized Adair, and was proud beyond measure to be serving him so romantically. It gave him an extraordinary fellow-feeling for Phyllis to have her also on her knees at the shrine of the demigod; and he overflowed with a hero-worship so naïve and sincere that she could not help liking him—grin and all. Indeed, it seemed a happy augury for her own future that Adair could excite so profound an admiration in those about him. Mr. Merguelis seemed as infatuated as she, and saw nothing strange in these midnight proceedings. There was approval in that everlasting grin. Would she please call him Tommy? Mr. Adair called him Tommy. They shook hands on it in the semi-darkness, and she knew she had found a friend.

Phyllis expected that Cyril would be waiting for her at the station, and was much cast down to learn that she was to remain alone with Tommy until the train arrived. "Then we'll all bustle on board together, and nobody will notice you," explained Tommy. The good sense of this was apparent, yet at the same time she could not help feeling a little forlorn and slighted. "Nobody will notice you," said Young Lochinvar's Tommy.—Now that the die was cast, why should she not be noticed? She was ready to avow herself Adair's before all the world, and why not on that dark, ill-lighted platform, when her courage was nearly spent and her slim young body drooping?

They sat on a bench, and waited in a corner of the vast cavern, she with her bag in her lap, Tommy with his unrelaxing grin fixed on space. Waited and waited, while stragglers passed, immigrants with babies and bundles, hurrying couples returning to the suburbs from a night in town. Above the noise there suddenly rose a louder thunder. It was the train bursting in with a roar, hissing steam and grinding its brakes as it slowed down, throbbing majestically. Tommy seized her by the arm and ran along the platform.

"Day car reserved for Steinberger's theatrical company?"

"Third car back."

"Day car reserved for Steinberger's theatrical company?"

"Jump in!"

Others were scrambling in, too. Phyllis had a fleeting glimpse of Miss de Vere, still with dabs of make-up on her sulky, handsome face; of the wicked Prince, loaded down with baggage, and excitedly taking the direction of everything on his shoulders; of a stout, authoritative Jew with a diamond pin, who was staring at her with a greedy curiosity, and that cattleman's look, as of one who could tell the shape, age, attractiveness, and market value of a human heifer at a single glance. They jostled into the empty car, a dozen or more, settling

themselves anywhere, anyhow, like a big boisterous family. Tommy and Phyllis slipped into a seat at the farther end, and they had hardly done so before the latter felt a hand reach over and touch her cheek; and turning, saw Adair! Tommy sprang up, and made way for him, Adair taking the vacated place as though by right.

Whatever pique she might have held against him vanished in the magic of his presence. His hand, closing on hers, communicated peace and resolution. No longer was she afraid, or lonely, or sad, or uneasily conscious of those other prying and speculating occupants of the car. The goal was attained; stronger shoulders than her own now lifted her burden; she had run her race, and could now lie, all spent and weary, in that haven of heart's content. His musical voice flowed on in caressing cadences. Had Tommy carried out his instructions? Had Tommy explained the need of an unobtrusive departure, so that any chance reporter or busybody might be put off the scent?—Oh, the poor baby, how neglected she must have felt, on this the night of nights; how utterly ignored and forgotten!

He drew her head against his cheap fur coat, and stroked her cheek and tresses—his sweetheart, his darling, his little bride! It was sweet to be petted; sweeter still to enjoy the luxury of self-pity as he expatiated with smiling exaggeration on her sad, miserable, wretched waiting with Tommy, in the sad, miserable, wretched station! She closed her sleepy eyes, and nestled closer, awake only to catch every soft word of endearment. Of these she could not have enough. It was heavenly to doze away with: "I love you, I love you, I love you," falling in that insatiable little ear; heavenly to feel that big hand playing with her hair, and tempting kisses as it lingered against her mouth; heavenly to feel so weak, and small, and helpless, and tired against that muscular arm. Divine mystery of love! Divine the dependence of woman on man, of man on woman, neither complete without the other, and each so different... "My little bride" ... "I love you, ... I love you, ... I love you..."

The train rumbled through the darkness. The seats held the huddled figures of the company, all as limp as sacks, as oblivion stole upon them. Feet were cocked up; hats were pulled over brows; haggard women, pale men, sprawling in disorder, and through long familiarity as unrestrained as some low, coarse family—sloppy slippers and frank stockings to the garter; unbuttoned collars, unbuttoned vests; dirty cuffs on racks—the squalid evidences of a squalid intimacy.

Looking down at that pure profile, and inhaling with every breath the fragrance of an exquisite young womanhood which would be his so soon to take, and, if he wished, to fling away, shattered and destroyed beyond all mending, Adair felt, with dawning comprehension, and mingled elation and pain, all that had gone to put this creature so infinitely above him.

What care, what money, what anxious thought had been lavished to make

her what she was. How incessant the effort; how jealous the guarding through all these years; how elaborate and costly the training to fit her for the proud, high position to which she had been born. It came over him with a strange new perception that the very innocence of her surrender was but another proof of that queenly rearing. She was not of a world where women suspected or bargained. They lived their gracious lives within triple walls, unaware of the sentinels and outposts for ever watching over them. And what were the sensations of the lucky thief, who had closed his fingers on the prize, and run? They were not altogether as joyful as one might have thought. The thief was very much bemused. That trusting head, snuggled against his breast, was causing a curious commotion in the heart beneath.

But he overcame the unmanly weakness. Hell, he would take what the gods had sent him. He hadn't raised a hand to get her; she had thrown herself at him; oh, she knew what she was doing, well enough, though she probably expected him to marry her. Perhaps he would, later on. He wasn't prepared right there to say he wouldn't. But there was plenty of time for that. He hoped she wouldn't turn out to be one of the crying, troublesome kind. Add a Laidlaw Wright father-in-law to that, and one might as well shoot oneself—what with writs, attachments, box-office seizures, injunctions, citations "to show cause," detectives going through your pockets, black eyes, fines, contempt-proceedings—all raining on a fellow in buckets! He smiled grimly at the recollection. No more of that for him.—Well, if she didn't like the other way, she would just have to make the best of it. Her innocence here again would be a great help. The poor little lamb believed every word he said. Besides, with women, kisses could always atone for everything.

The train rumbled on and on. Adair succumbed to a fitful and uneasy slumber, through which there ran a thread of tormenting dreams. He had lost her; they had become separated, and over the heads of a crowd he saw her disappearing in a vortex of hurrying people; he struggled unavailingly to follow, swearing, hitting out, shouldering and elbowing like a madman; the cruel reality of it awakened him to find her sleeping in his arms. He awakened her, too,—roughly,—to share his relief, his joy. He made her hold him round the neck; made her kiss him, all sleepy as she was; crushed and cuddled her in a transport of sudden passion. Then he nodded off again, his lips resting on her silken hair, blissfully content, and no longer afraid to close his heavy lids.

They were bundled off at Ferrisburg at three in the morning, all of them so sodden with sleep that they could scarcely keep their eyes open. A dilapidated bus, and a freckled boy received them, the former representing the Clarendon Hotel, the latter, Miss MacGlidden's theatrical boarding-house. The company divided accordingly, with some grumpy facetiousness, the lesser members trailing

away on foot after the boy, the principals climbing into the bus,—the trunks of both stacked high on the platform to await the morning.

The hotel, in spite of its fine name, was a bare, dismal, ramshackle place; and the lowered lights, and uncarpeted floors gave it a peculiarly forbidding air as the doors were unlocked to admit them. Phyllis, clinging to her lover's arm, and overcome with weariness, took little heed of the arrangements being made for their accommodation. She had no idea of the *Cyril Adair and wife* that was being written almost under her nose. Even when she accompanied Cyril up-stairs at the heels of a yawning darcy, she was equally unaware that her room was also to be his. No sleepy child at her father's side could have been more trusting.

The darcy shuffled off, leaving them alone together in the big, cold bedroom. Adair took her in his arms, and kissed her, murmuring something that she only half heard and altogether failed to understand. All that she grasped was that he would return in a little while—that she was to undress, and go to bed, while he went down to get his dress-suit case. He opened her own little bag, and laughed as he arranged the contents on the chiffonier, she with blushes, struggling to restrain him. Then he was gone, and when she went to lock the door, she found that the key was gone, also.

She took off her hat, her cloak, her bodice, and with no light save a pair of wretched candles began to brush her unloosened hair. A terrible misgiving was stealing over her which she tried to allay by prolonging this familiar task. The missing key, the talk of coming back—what was she to think? A deadly fear struck at her heart. It was not all for her honor. There was more at stake than even that—the greater disaster of Adair's unworthiness. Could this be the love for which she had abandoned everything? Was it all a lie, a fraud, a trick? She suddenly seemed to lose the strength to stand, sinking into the nearest, chair, huddled and trembling.

No, no, he could not be so inconceivably base. She was wrong. His love was as real as hers. He was incapable of such coldblooded premeditation. Everything she had was his. It was not that. The thought of giving herself to him had filled her with an unreasoning joy. But to be cheated, to barter her life, her soul in exchange for his pretense—oh, she would have rather died! She would have starved for him, would have sold the clothes off her back for him, would have borne unflinchingly odium, contempt, disgrace, asking only that he love her well. But without that—! It was for him to choose; she had no resistance left; but if it were, indeed, all a lie she would kill herself the next day. One could outlive many things, but not *that*. There are some cheats that leave one with no redress save death.

She heard his step in the corridor; heard the door softly open; looked up with dilating eyes to learn her fate. The words Adair meant to say never were

said. He stopped, staring down at her with a gaze as questioning as her own. It was one of those instants that decide eternities. All that she had thought, all that she had dreaded were articulate in the piteous face she raised to his. It was a look, which, mysteriously, for that perceptive instant was open for him to read.

"They have got me a room on the other side of the house," he said, "but I had to come back first to say good night." He ran over to her, kissed her lightly on her bared shoulder, pressed a great handful of her hair across his lips, and hurried away before temptation could overmaster him.

There was no one to be found anywhere, but he remembered the stove still burning in the bar-room, and the empty chairs gathered socially about it. Thither he made his way through the silent office and corridors, and drawing his cheap fur coat close about him, settled himself to pass what little remained of the night. There was sawdust on the floor, spittoons, scraps of sausage-rind; the air stank stalely of beer and spirits; the single gas-jet, turned very low, flickered over the nude women that decorated the mean, fly-blown walls, and flickered, too, over a man, half-slumbering in a chair, who, but glimmeringly to himself, had taken the turning road of his life.

## CHAPTER XVII

The sensation of most runaway couples, after filling up a blank form, and having a marriage service gabbled over them by a shabby stranger in a frock-coat, is one of unmixed astonishment at the facility of the whole proceeding. A dog-license is no harder to obtain, and the formalities attending vaccination are even greater.

Phyllis emerged from the Reverend Josiah Lyell's with a ring on her finger, and a cardboard certificate on which the Almighty, angels, and forked lightning were depicted above her name and Adair's. The first discussion of their married life was what to do with this monstrosity. Phyllis was for tearing it up, but Adair, superstitiously afraid of bad luck, insisted stoutly on its being retained.

"I'll hide it at the bottom of my trunk," he said.

They returned to the carriage, which was awaiting them as composedly as though nothing in particular had happened in the ten-minute interval. Adair wished to take a drive before going back to the hotel, thinking that the air and repose would be soothing for their nerves,—but to his surprise Phyllis demurred.

"I've been married your way," she said, "now you must come and be married

mine.”

”Yours, Phyllis?”

”Yes, tell him to drive to a Catholic church.”

He gave the order good-humoredly. ”Aren’t you satisfied?” he asked. ”Do you want more angels and forked lightning?”

”You see, I’ve always been a sort of Catholic,” she explained. ”Not a good Catholic, but a poor little straggler, galloping on half a mile behind, like a baby sheep that’s got left. I’ve never liked the confession part of it, but really, Cyril, there’s a sort of whiff of Heaven about a Catholic church that I need occasionally. It’s just as though you were awfully hungry, and went in to smell a beautiful dinner a long way off!”

”All right, Phyllis, if we are going to get married we might as well do it thoroughly,” assented Adair. ”If you think that beautiful dinner will help us any, let’s go and smell it by all means.”

As kind fate would have it, it was rather an attractive church, and better still it was altogether deserted. The autumn sunshine was streaming through stained-glass windows; a faint perfume of incense lingered in the air; the peace and solitude gave an added dignity to the altar, with its suffering pale Christ, its tall candles, its effulgent brasses gleaming in the rosy light. Phyllis made Adair kneel at her side, and holding his hand tightly in hers, prayed silently with downcast eyes, and the least quiver of a smile at the corner of her lips.

On their way out they stopped at the font. She crossed herself, touched her fingers to the water, and scattered some drops on Adair’s face. ”That’s that you will always love me,” she said, with captivating solemnity, ”that’s that you will always be true to me; and that’s that—I may die first!”

Adair dabbled his own hand in the holy water, as though the act had a religious significance, ”Oh, God,” he said, looking up in all seriousness, ”if there is a God—take care of this sweet wife of mine, and guard her from every harm; and if there isn’t, I swear by this I am going to do it myself just as well as I know how!”

They kissed each other, and were about to go, when Phyllis noticed the poor-box. She slipped off her best ring, a little diamond such as girls are permitted to wear, and unhesitatingly dropped it in. Adair, caught by the picturesqueness of the offering, would have sacrificed his horseshoe pin had he not been prevented.

”No, that’s too pretty,” she cried jealously. ”Haven’t you something you don’t like that God *would*?”

A little rummaging discovered a gold pencil-case which seemed to fulfill this demand—at least on Adair’s side—and it forthwith followed the ring. Then they sought the open air.

”Now, at last I feel really married,” said Phyllis gaily, as they climbed back

into the carriage. "What a strange, dizzy, *safe* sort of feeling it gives one. And just think I could hug you right now before the driver, and that old lady with the basket, and that little boy blowing his baby brother's nose—and nobody could say Boo!"

[image]

*She waited for him at the stage-door.—Page 284*

She alarmed Adair by pretending to carry the hugging into effect until he tried to push her away, and told her to behave. She replied with a delighted, bubbling outcry over her new freedom: "Oh, but I'm married now, and can do just what I like, and can have breakfast in bed with you every morning, and put my shoes out with yours to be blacked, and I'm Mrs. Adair, and have a wedding-ring, and a certificate with forked lightning on it!" She exultantly popped up her feet on the seat in front, showing a shocking amount of black silk stocking with a bravado that made him grab at her skirt to pull it down; and in the ensuing romp there was more silk stocking still, and so much happy laughter on her part, and scandalized protestation on his that the driver turned round, and they were all but disgraced.

The narrowness of the escape sobered her, and for the rest of the drive she was demureness itself. What a joy it was to recline with half-shut eyes, and let the air fan away all the troubled memories of the night before! Mind and body craved repose, and mind and body found it in the cradle-like movement of the carriage. Adair was very tired, too, and willing enough to share his pretty companion's mood. Deliciously conscious of each other, though more asleep than awake, they abandoned themselves to the fresh bright morning, and breathed in deep drafts of contentment.

On their return to the hotel, the carriage stopped and Tommy Merguelis jumped up on the step. His perennial grin, and withered, foolish face was not unclouded by a certain anxiety. He dropped a bunch of roses into Phyllis' lap, with an awkward compliment which got as far as she was a rose herself, and then ended midway with a terrified giggle.

"I'm awful sorry," he said, addressing Adair, "but you're wanted at the theater, Mr. Adair, and I've been chasing around after you for the last half-hour. They want you to rehearse right off with Miss Clarke, and coach her a bit in the business."

"Why, what's the matter with De Vere?" asked Adair, surprised.

A slight glaze seemed to spread itself over the grin.

"She won't be in the bill for a day or two," said Tommy. "She's been suddenly taken awful bad." He paused, seeking a decorous name for the attack in question, and finally veiled it in the obscurity of a foreign language: "A crisis de nerves," he added.

"Oh, tantrums?" said Adair in a plainer tongue. "What a confounded nuisance!"

"She kept yelling and yelling until we got the doctor," went on Tommy; "and then on top of that Miss Clarke had to get into a hair-pulling match with Miss Larkins—and so I think you had better hurry, Mr. Adair, if there's to be anything doing to-night."

"Great Lord, I think so, too!" cried the latter, to whom, like all stars, the evening performance was next to a religion. "You go on to the hotel," he went on, turning to Phyllis, "and make yourself as comfortable as you can." The vexation in his voice was even a better apology than the one in words. "I'm damned sorry," he said. "It's the most infernal shame. Forgive me, Phyllis, please do, and try not to mind."

Thus it was that she drove to the hotel alone, while Adair and Tommy strode off to quiet the tempest in the theater, and start a tedious and prolonged rehearsal with Miss de Vere's understudy.

Phyllis went to her room, and found one alleviation of its loneliness in examining that mysterious object, her wedding-ring. It was so strange, so unfamiliar, so charged with significance and finality. Just a trifling hoop of gold, and yet with what myriad meanings. Probably in days gone by, when of brass or iron it was riveted on the neck, little brides mirrored themselves in pools with a similar awe at their altered state, and a similar questioning of the unknown future.

For better or worse, for good or evil, her life was linked to Adair's beyond all recalling, and the emblem of their compact glittered on the hand she gazed at so long and earnestly.

But you can not hypnotize yourself for ever with a wedding-ring—even one not two hours old. There was another matter that called more insistently for her attention. Cyril had promised her two hundred and fifty dollars for her clothes, and it behooved her to get pen and ink, and begin making her calculations. This she did with much erasing, much crinkling of girlish brows—with a profound, wise-baby expression as though all the world were at stake. There was a delicious immodesty in spending Adair's money for such laced and rib-boned femininities—nightgowns, stockings, chemises, and what she wrote down ambiguously as "those things," and colored as she wrote it. How thrilling it was, and how exquisitely shocking! Oh, dear, what nice ones they would have to be,—twenty-five dollars gone for six in the twinkling of an eye, for surely economy

here would be a crime, men being notoriously fond of—

”Mrs. Adair?”

Her new name was so unfamiliar that she hesitated before answering: ”Come in.”

”A gentleman to see you, Mrs. Adair.”

The door opened, and there on the threshold stood her father! His face was white, his eyes morose and sunken, his whole air so formidable that in the first shock of recognition Phyllis could do no more than stare at him in terror.

”May I enter?” he asked, in that deeper intonation of his which he never used except under some special stress. As he spoke he looked about sharply, and with a bristling hostility as though expecting to discover a second occupant of the room.

”Mr. Adair isn’t here,” she said, answering the silent question. ”I am all alone, Papa.”

She would have kissed him, but he brushed past her to a chair, and seated himself heavily, laying his silk hat and his gloves on the floor beside him. Thus stalwartly in possession of the chamber, he appeared more formidable than ever, and the deliberate gaze he bent on Phyllis was masterful and menacing.

”So you’ve gone and thrown away your life,” he said at last. ”Forgive me, my dear, if I am not able to congratulate you upon it.”

”I married Mr. Adair this morning, if that’s what you mean.” She hardly knew how to say more without adding to her offense. Her father was bound to put her in the wrong whatever reply she made. A terrible hopelessness weighed her down, and crushed the unspoken appeal on her lips.

”Thrown away like that,” he repeated, with a gesture. ”You, who had everything; you, with beauty, position, money, brains—my God, the folly of it—the cruel, wicked, heartless folly of it!”

”Don’t, Papa!” she pleaded. ”It’s done, and so what’s the good of wounding me now?”

”Done!” he cried out bitterly. ”That depends on what you mean by the word. I will call it done in six months when you will leave him for good, and he will name his price for a divorce. That’s the way adventurers marry money nowadays. They enjoy the girl till they are tired of her, and then sell!”

Phyllis struggled to keep her composure under the affront. ”You are very unjust,” she returned in a low voice that trembled in spite of herself. ”You are determined to think the worst of him, and make it impossible for us ever to be friends. But you are wrong, Papa. He’s not an adventurer, nor anything like it. Surely I ought to know better than you, and if I have been willing to love him, and marry him—”

”Oh, I’m not going to argue with you about him,” interrupted Mr. Ladd

harshly. "You believe in him now, of course. One can't reason with lunatics, and I shan't try. I'll give you six months—perhaps even less—and then I want you to remember what I am saying to you now."

"That you were right?"—Her voice was scornful.—"Oh, Papa, this is unworthy of you."

"Phyllis," he retorted, "that's the last thing on earth I would ever say to you. If you should come back to me disillusioned, broken, utterly weary of the muddle you have made of it all, you will find everything unchanged between us and the whole matter as ignored as though it had never been. That's what you are to remember—that my heart and my purse will never be closed against you."

"Though both are dependent on my giving up my husband?"

"He will give you up, my dear, fast enough."

"How dare you say that, Papa—how dare you!" A mist of anger was in her eyes, and two spots of crimson glowed dangerously on her cheeks. Never in her life had she been more roused; up to that moment she had still hoped to save the day and win her father over, but now she perceived the irrevocable nature of what was being said. Yet outwardly, at least, she restrained herself, and hid within her quivering breast a tumult that seemed to rend her to pieces.

"If I seem to be misjudging Mr. Adair it is only because I know more about him than you do," continued Mr. Ladd in a tone not untinged with a grim satisfaction. Even as he spoke he drew out a thick packet, and unfolded it on his knee. It was a mass of typewriting, with here and there a notorial seal on paper of a different color, and an occasional newspaper cutting neatly pasted in the center of a little sea of comment. "Here we have him in black and white," he went on, "and frankly, Phyllis, he offers you a very poor promise of a happy married life."

"And you expect me on my wedding morning to sit down and read these things—these abominable slanders your detectives have scraped together?"

"Oh, no. But I demand to have Mr. Adair sit down and answer them."

"Would you believe him if he did?"

"Facts are facts. He can't deny them."

"And you called *me* unreasonable? Oh, Papa!"

Mr. Ladd ignored the taunt.

"When he appreciates that his whole disreputable past is known to me," he went on, with the same inflexible composure, "he may condescend to consider—an arrangement."

"An arrangement?—What do you mean?"

"I have brought a blank check with me," he explained. "He can name anything—and get it. I'd rather pay more now than less later."

His brutality overwhelmed her. It took her a few seconds to understand the incredible baseness he imputed to Adair. In the light of this her father's previous

insults paled to insignificance. She was too stunned to make any reply, and for a while could do nothing but look at him in speechless wonder. Then she rose, and rang the bell.

"The marriage could be annulled," said Mr. Ladd, oblivious of everything except his one preoccupation. "The next thing is to keep the newspapers quiet, and that I can do. We'll go abroad—"

The darky came running up with a pitcher of ice water. No one ever rang for anything else in the Clarendon Hotel. He entered, jingling the ice.

"Show this gentleman out," said Phyllis, "and I want you to remember I shall not be home to him again."

"Phyllis!"

The entreaty in his voice moved her not a bit, nor the outstretched hand, veined, wrinkled and shaking.

"It's conceivable I may forgive you for this, Papa," she exclaimed, "though God knows it will be hard. But if you offer that check to Cyril I shall hate you till the day I die!"

"Have it your own way then," he returned dully, and with a curious break in his voice. "Take your own wilful road, and come back to me when your heart's broken. I'll be waiting for you, Phyllis, and ready to forget and forgive."

She disdained to make any reply. The darky officiously gathered up the silk hat and gloves from the floor, and presented them to Mr. Ladd. The latter, with a last look at his daughter's unrelenting face, turned in silence, and passed out.

"The stairs are to the left, sah," said the darky.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Whether disillusion was finally destined to arrive or not, there was certainly not a hint of it during those succeeding weeks. There was no happier little bride in America, than Phyllis Adair, and intimate acquaintance with that extraordinary creature, man, only redoubled her delight in him. The bigness, directness, simplicity, intolerance, and dog-like devotion of her husband were an unfailing joy to her. No little girl who had been given a coveted St. Bernard could have taken more anxious, eager, excited care of him. She would feed Adair with the daintiest morsels from her own plate; she would exert every faculty she possessed to amuse and distract him when he fell into one of his despondent moods; she would

mock him with such pretty archness when he grew irritable over trifles. "Damn it all, where did that fool Williams put my patent leather shoes?"—"Damn it all, you will find them in the bottom of the wardrobe neatly ranged with the others," she would answer. No matter how ill his humor she always found the means to make him smile; her quick wit, or her slim, audacious body each exultantly willing to tease and bewitch him.

Of all human gifts surely that of loving has received the least general recognition. A genius for music, a genius for mathematics or natural history, or sculpture, or mechanics, is at once admitted and acclaimed. But what of a genius for loving, which of all is infinitely the rarest? The trouble is that every one is conceited enough to think that he (or she) is a wonder at it. But frankly, do we really indeed see so many love-geniuses about us? Are we not rather struck instead by an almost universal love-poverty? If the husband stays drearily at home every night of his life, and if the wife is entirely absorbed in the baby, are we not asked enthusiastically to applaud a happy home? This is the national ideal, and tens of thousands are yawning heroically through it. But where's love in any but half-pint sizes? Everybody insists it is there in barrellfuls, much as they insisted in the fairy tale in the case of the man with the invisible clothes.—We are not defending hubby when he gets tangled up with the blonde lady, but emotionally speaking (only *emotionally*, be it understood), it may be an upward step. If you have a ten per cent. capacity to love, it is hard to be fobbed off with a four per cent. partner.

Phyllis was one of the chosen few in whom the capacity to love was inordinate. Her one thought was to make herself indispensable to the man to whom she had given herself. Adair was the last thing in her head at night, the first at dawn. Hardly was there an act of hers in which his personality was not a contributing factor. Her insatiable ambition was to please and delight him, and her brain was ever busy to find fresh ways, and improve on the old. Her finesse, her humor, her ardent and tender imagination—all were enlisted to a single end. Passion she had in plenty, for she was of a voluptuous nature, and the blood coursed hotly in her veins—but she had more than that to give him, and was possessed of a thousand captivating arts to ensnare this love that was said to be so elusive, and bind it tight with a myriad silken threads.

It will be asked was Adair worthy of so supreme a devotion? Is it not enough to answer that he was not altogether unworthy? There was a lot of human clay in the creature, and while Phyllis was exerting all her blithe young ardor to keep the altar-fires aflame, he was content to look on lazily, and man-like, take many things for granted. Had she been no better, their love would have run the ordinary course, and perished fast enough on the rocks of habit and satiety. Adair's spiritual side was all but dormant. He was encased in materialism as stoutly as some of us in fat; whatever gropings he had toward higher things were

all in the direction of the stage. Feelings he could not initiate himself he took here ready made, and showed almost a genius in their comprehension. He presented a paradox of one who could admirably "get into" any written character, and yet who was wholly unable to "get into" his own.

Phyllis knew much more what laid beneath than he. To her the yearning, troubled, inarticulate soul of the man appealed as pathetically as the sight of some great, ashamed, bearded fellow who had never been taught to read. In the finer sense Adair had never been taught anything. His instincts alone had saved him from being a clod. In his fight up from the bottom he had arrived a good deal splashed with mud; and Phyllis, figuratively speaking, rolled back her sleeves, and set herself to tubbing him.

He was extraordinarily submissive in this respect, extraordinarily grateful and responsive. He made no pretense of hiding his ignorance, but questioned her like a child, and often as artlessly. At thirty-four he was having the universe reconstructed for him, and the process filled him with astonishment. Phyllis read aloud to him from such unheard-of authors as Thackeray, Carlyle, Hardy, Stevenson, and Meredith until these strange names became quite familiar. She could read French, too, translating as she went, while he sat back, profoundly respectful and impressed, his humility tinged with the zest of ownership. Yes, her youth, her beauty, her intelligence, her love, all were his; and as he gazed at her through the haze of his cigar, the words often fell heedlessly on his ear as he felt the mantling of a divine contentment.

Yet he could be very masterful on some matters. Phyllis was not allowed to receive the advances of the company, or to associate with any of its members, a prohibition not a little difficult to obey in the course of their constant traveling together. But if Phyllis shrank from being rude, Adair suffered from no similar delicacy, and was brutally direct in making his wishes plain to his stage companions. It was not only that he feared Lydia de Vere, whose yellowish eyes were full of enmity, and whose powers for mischief he well knew; but in contrast to his dainty wife these theater-people somehow began to strike him as tarnished and common, and he was jealously reluctant to expose her to their familiarities. Intercourse with Phyllis was sharpening his critical faculty; his view-point was insensibly changing; there were even times when he realized his own deficiencies.—Tommy Merguelis was the one exception he made. The lanky young man, when weighed in the new scales, was found to be less wanting than the others. There was something sensitive and refined about Tommy. Ill-health, pins, and years of furniture-polish had been as cleansing fires. He was a humble person who would accept his humble inch and grin gratefully, and not reach out for an ell. Yes, Phyllis might be friends with Tommy.

With them on their travels from town to town went a punching-bag, which

Adair inflated and set up as soon as their trunks were unpacked. Every morning, stripped to the waist, Phyllis had to double up her little fists, and start a-pummelling for ten furious minutes. There could be no begging off from this daily rite; it was one of the iron rules of married life; pleadings, caresses, protests all were in vain. An icy bath had to follow, and if she hesitated too long on the brink, or showed too mutinous a row of toes, Adair would jump up, and tumble her in as mercilessly as a boy with a puppy. At night, too, he was no less rigid in regard to her prayers. His own religion was very nebulous. He never prayed himself nor went to church; but apparently that was no reason why Phyllis should be similarly backward. It gave him a peculiar pleasure to see her kneeling beside the bed, her night dress flowing about her slender, girlish body, and her hair drawn back, and held by a cirlet of red ribbon. He knew no prettier picture, nor was it without a tender and uplifting value. For it was his name that moved on her lips, and who would not have been proud to send so enchanting a little deputy to plead for one before the Throne of Grace? Then it was that he seemed to love her best; and though all unaware of it, he, too, was praying in the deeper, unspoken language of the heart.

"You've forgotten your prayers!"

"Oh, it was so cold—I thought I wouldn't to-night."

"Jump up!"

"It's so cosy here with you—and you ought to have said it sooner—and anyhow, I won't."

"Jump up!"

"Oh, Cyril, that hurts!"

"Of course, it hurts."

"It's wicked to pinch as hard as that."

"It's wickeder not to say your prayers."

"Oh, Cyril, don't, *don't!*"

"Jump up, then."

"I'm not in the right frame of mind now—you have pinched it all away.—All right, all right, don't—I'll do it! Though I don't think a pinch-prayer would be as good as a real one. Do you?"

"This is the prayer-rush time—God won't notice it."

"Not even if I am black and blue? Why, the angels will be shocked."

"They are that already with the fuss you have made. Roll out, you bad little chap,—out with you!"

Sometimes Adair was sharp with her—impatient and fretful. He made very little effort to control his moods, which, as with most artists, were as changeable and capricious as those of a child. Nine women out of ten would have retorted in kind, and the honeymoon period would have insensibly passed, and with it much

of the charm and rapture of their union. It was due to no help of Adair's that they did not descend to the ordinary plane of married life, with its deliquescence of nearly everything beautiful and romantic—occasional harshness on one side, tears and pin-prickings on the other, and departing illusions on both. People can still get along very tolerably in this manner, and remain fairly fond and faithful, but no one can contend it is the poet's ideal. It was certainly not Phyllis', and she was determined to avoid such a catastrophe.

In her ambitious little head the honeymoon was to be only the beginning of a sweeter intimacy beyond. She saw, lying latent in Adair, a capacity to love as great as her own (she was presumptuous enough to think that no one could love any better), and her one consuming endeavor was to draw it forth. Whether or not the prize was worth the winning never occurred to her. This big, splendid, untamed man-animal was hers, with all his weaknesses and defects, with all his fine qualities and bad, and she had accepted the responsibility of him with naïve self-confidence. To love was her vocation, and she set herself to it with delight.

Her unfailing gaiety, her pretty artifices to amuse and cajole him, her constant study of means to give him pleasure—all were as the drops that wear away the stone. High-spirited, quick-tempered, and with a sensitiveness that a glance could wound, she yet put such a rein upon herself that no provocation could draw from her an unkind word. She might grow suddenly silent, her mouth might quiver, her eyes glisten, but no sharp retort ever passed her lips. There are many men with whom this would not have answered. To some, indeed, an exquisite gentleness and forbearance almost tempts their harshness. Feeling themselves in the wrong their vanity is insulted, and with morbid perversity they go from bad to worse. But Adair was not of this sort. With all his faults he was a man of generous instincts, and capable of quick and headlong repentances. He could come in like a thunder-cloud, on edge with nerves, snappish, morose, ready to fly off the tangent at a trifle—and five minutes later would be sitting at Phyllis' feet, his face in her lap, conquered, contrite, declaiming hotly against himself, his ill-temper all striking inward.

These lapses of his helped his love much more than they hurt it, and through them he began to acquire some self-control, some degree of consideration—some shame. In him devotion brought out devotion. Instead of resenting Phyllis' stratagems to keep him good-humored and happy, he was touched to the quick. It was a new idea, this of keeping love alight; of consecrating thought and care to it and guarding the precious flame from extinction. It dawned upon him as something entirely novel and unheard-of. Yet it was beautiful; he approved of it heartily. He innocently ascribed the invention to Phyllis, and as usual was tremendously impressed. It made him wonder whether she ever thought of anything else but love. As he grew to know her better he saw that it

inspired all she did—that every impulse and every action sprang from it.

Had he been a king, and she the transient, pretty butterfly of the moment, she could not have striven harder to fascinate and hold him. Her saucy tongue, her fancifulness, her audacity, her often-declared determination to be as much sweetheart as wife—all were as spice to a love that might otherwise have cloyed. To adore a man is not enough—there is nothing the poor darling silly animal gets tired of so soon as being adored.—One had to keep him interested, captivated, filling in one's own little person all his complicated needs of passion, comradeship, entertainment, variety, and mental recreation. But how well one was repaid! If one gave a whole harem's worth of love, one received a whole harem's worth back, and sweetest of all one could watch the unfolding and ripening of a really fine nature. She was sure her infatuation had guided her truly in that respect; that her choice had fallen on a man with heart and soul big enough to repay her devotion. He might be rough, but she had never a moment's doubt as to the diamond, nor as to her ability to shape and polish it.

It was a process, unfortunately, that could not be hurried. Against her in the endeavor were the ingrained habits and wilfulness of twenty years. From his boyhood up Adair had lived in an atmosphere of unrestraint, a Bohemian of Bohemians, without ties, care-free, the whim of the moment his only guide. Some backslidings on his part were inevitable and Phyllis, with all her illusions, was sane and cool enough to foresee them. It was hardly a surprise to her, therefore, though frightening and dismaying, when late one night, after awaiting him in vain, Tommy Merguelis appeared unexpectedly in his stead. Any stranger to the young man would have judged him to be in high spirits; his shrill, nervous laugh was louder than usual; and he stammered and giggled as though bubbling over with an unextinguishable good nature. To Phyllis' practised eyes, however, these were ominous signs, and her breath came a little quickly, as she asked news of her husband.

"Oh, he's all right," said Tommy, standing with one hand on the door-knob, and showing no inclination to enter the room. "Oh, Mr. Adair is all right—and hee, hee, don't you worry about him. He's detained, that's all, and he sent me to say he might be late, and, and—"

"And what?"

"They've got him into a game down at Mr. Feld's—the owner of the theater, hee, hee—and he couldn't well refuse, or at least—"

"Oh, Tommy, please—I don't understand."

"Just a little game of draw."

"Cards?"

"Yes—poker."

This did not strike Phyllis as anything very terrible.

"And he sent you to tell me he would be late?" she inquired, much reassured.

Tommy lied manfully. As a matter of fact he had invented the message—and the errand—to shield Adair, who had forgotten everything in the absorption of the game. "Yes," he said, "he can't manage to be back to supper with you, and is awful sorry about it, and hopes you won't mind." Though Tommy could lie, he could not act. His anxiety was obvious; he wriggled uncomfortably; and his silly, convulsive smile presaged some disagreeable revelation. Phyllis, now thoroughly alarmed, and with characteristic directness went straight for the truth.

"Tommy, has he been drinking?"

"Oh, ah, well, hee, hee—yes, he has."

"And they are playing high?"

"A dollar limit."

"And you came here to warn me? Don't deny it."

"Oh, ah, well, hee, hee—yes, I did, Mrs. Adair."—As Phyllis paused, troubled, uncertain, full of distress, Tommy added: "I don't know as it wouldn't be a good plan for you to come along with me and get him."

"Would he come?"

"Anybody would come for you, Mrs. Adair."

"Surely he doesn't often gamble, Tommy. He has never spoken to me of it?"

"Oh, there's nothing he don't do when the fit takes him. Hee, hee, he's that kind, you know—temperamental."

The word, and the woebegone indulgence with which it was uttered made Phyllis smile. Her humor was always close to the surface, even when there were tears between.

"You are a dear, good fellow," she said, "and I'll never forget your kindness to-night, though as for doing anything, I am going to stay here."

He was amazed at the gentleness of her tone.

"I am never going to be his taskmaster," she went on, as much to herself as to Tommy. "As far as I am concerned he shall always be as free as air. If I went after him at all, it would be to sit on his knee, and drink with him."

Tommy's scandalized face again made her laugh.

"Don't be afraid," she said with tremulous gaiety, "I won't do it this evening, anyhow. Now run away, Tommy, and tell them down-stairs we shan't need any supper after all."

She shut the door after him, and stood with her back to it, forlornly regarding the empty room. She was more than hurt, more than mortified. She had to

ask herself if she had failed.

## CHAPTER XIX

It was dawn when Adair staggered in, undressed and rolled in beside her. Her long vigil had been succeeded by an overpowering slumber, and she was not aware of his return until the streaming sunshine awakened her toward nine o'clock. She wondered at first why her heart was so heavy, and then, with reviving recollection, sat up, and gazed at her sleeping husband. Even a debauch could not impair his fine complexion, and the thick, black hair clustered against the ruddy skin softened Phyllis' expression as she studied his face long and earnestly. The charm of that vigorous manhood was irresistible, and whatever lurking grudge she still had against Adair was lost in a fresh access of tenderness. His uneasy breathing, his hot dry forehead, his parched and parted lips, all appealed as well to the woman in her—the mother, the nurse.

For once the routine of punching-bag and bath was forgone, and her first task on rising was to set about preparing breakfast. This, with the pair, was a trifling matter, consisting of rolls, cream and butter ordered over night and set outside their door on a tray every morning, and the coffee Phyllis made herself over a spirit lamp. She was thus busily engaged when she was conscious of a movement on the bed, and turned to see her husband lowering at her with bloodshot eyes. Awake, he looked disheveled, surly, ill and exasperated. His head was splitting, and he was in one of those vile humors when a man avenges his physical distress on those about him. He pushed Phyllis away as she ran over to him, and told her roughly to leave him alone. The offer of a cup of coffee outraged him. Groaning and swearing, he pulled himself into a sitting posture, and in a voice as intentionally disagreeable as he could make it demanded some hot water.

Holding the cup in both hands, he began to drink it in angry little sips, finding a malign satisfaction in the change that had come over Phyllis. Pale, silent, wounded and frightened, she was utterly at loss to know what to do. Every word was a stab, and she had a stupefying feeling that the end had come. Her only coherent thought, the only manifestation of resentment within her, was to contribute nothing to bring about the catastrophe. If Adair were determined to pull down their little paradise about their ears, and destroy for ever the filmy and

poetic fabric of a perfect love, she, at least, would hold herself innocent of the sacrilege. But, oh, the pang of it, the heartrending misery, the disillusion!

"Now, go ahead," he said sullenly. "I'm ready-go ahead!"

She faltered and trembled in asking him what he meant.

He burst out with a scornful laugh.

"I was drunk last night," he said, "you know that as well as I do, and here I am ready to take my medicine—can't avoid it, I know that—and want to get it over with. You wouldn't be a woman if you didn't pay me out."

The vulgarity of the conception stung her.

"I—I don't pay people out," she said simply.

"Oh, no, you're the quiet kind," he went on with an ugly jeer, intent somehow on putting her in the wrong. "You don't say anything, but you sit there and freeze a fellow—and oh, my God, yes, cry! There you go, cry, cry, cry!"

She did break down for a moment under his deliberate cruelty, but quickly rallying, came over, and sat beside him on the bed.

"Don't, don't quarrel with me," she said pitifully, and then added with a gleam of humor, "after all, it wasn't I that was drunk, you know."

She put out her hand, and for a while he permitted it to lie against his aching forehead. All would have been well had he not unfortunately spilled his cup. At this his latent fury broke out anew.

"For God's sake, don't crowd all over me!" he cried. "Sit over there, where we can talk like sensible people. You have made me all wet with the damned stuff."

The fault was his own, and due to his unsteady hands, but he was wilfully pleased to put her in the wrong. He glowered at her with savage reproach as she moved a little farther away in obedience to his command. She was disconcertingly quiet, and it seemed to him an added injustice to be cheated of a scene. There was nothing but her anguished eyes, and her drooping and utterly dispiriting attitude to tell him how well he was succeeding.

"You're a little fool," he announced inconsequently.

He waited for her to answer, but she made no sign of having heard him, sitting there stricken, numb.

"To have tied up with such a damned goat," he added, with immense conviction.

Still no answer.

"The best thing you can do is to pack up and go," he went on.

At this she did find her voice, ghost of a one that it was.

"Is that what you really want me to do, Cyril?"

"It's what you ought to do," he returned, with a sternly paternal air.

"It's for you to decide."

His mumbling reply turned into a groan.

"I lost nearly four hundred dollars last night," he said, after a deadly pause. "Then I had to get into a scrap with Jake Steinberger, and Willie Latimer, and George Wright, and there was a hell of a shindy till somebody turned in a police-alarm, and I only dodged arrest by the skin of my teeth—not but what I'll be summonsed to-day, sure as sure. On top of that my engagement is gone, for I lammed Jake half to death, and I guess he had rather break up the tour all-standing than keep me in the bill another night. And—and—"

"You thought you'd make a clean sweep of everything, once you were at it, and alienate me, too?"

"Yes, like a damned goat," he repeated dully.

"Well, you have succeeded," she said in the same low, even tone, "I dare say you'll be sorry some day at having broken your toys. There isn't anything more to be said, is there, except good-by?"

She was about to rise when Adair flung himself out of the bed, and kneeling before her, pulled off her little slippers and began kissing her naked feet. His repentance was so sudden, so abject that it was almost as though he had gone crazy. It was indeed an hysterical revulsion, and his frame shook, and his hands clenched themselves on her flesh as he abased himself before her. He begged incoherently for forgiveness, for mercy; he would kill himself if she were to leave him; he loved her; he could die for her; the disgrace and despair of it all had driven him mad. At first she resisted, struggling to free herself, and too deeply affronted for any atoning words to touch her; but her powerlessness in his grasp, the warmth of his quick, tumultuous breath against her, even the physical pain he was unconsciously inflicting—all at last took her womanhood by storm, and she drew up his head, and allowed him to sob his heart out in her lap.

How little did either of them know, she sitting on the bed in her night-dress, he nestling close against her in an agony of shame and contrition, that a battle of the soul had been fought and won; that the finer nature had triumphed over the coarser; that an insensible but a most real step had been taken upward. Phyllis extorted no promises; Adair made no vows; rather they clung to each other like little children who had safely passed the edge of a precipice, and in security beyond were trembling at what they had risked.

The woman, always the more practical partner, was the first to descend from the clouds to mundane considerations.

"And what's the poor little damned goat going to do?" she asked, the quoted profanity on her pretty lips as piquant and tender as a lullaby; and accompanying it with a smile so arch that Adair's face, too, could not but light with it.

"Face the music and then get out," returned the D. G.

"Out where, dearest?"

Adair grew overcast.

"Mortimer Clark's on the road somewhere," he said reflectively, "and I'm sure he'd make room for me if he had to fire a whole company. Then there's Nan O'Farrell in the *Diamond Diadem* and Leo Foster in the *Slaves of Circumstance*. They are all on the cheap, and would jump at the chance of getting me at their prices. As soon as I get round to it, I'll telegraph."

Phyllis hesitated, but at last the words came.

"On the cheap," she repeated. "Why don't you aim higher, Cyril? Why don't you try the real people—those who are worth while, especially now, when you're going to break away from Steinberger?"

His only reply was a shake of the head.

"You know you're too good for this sort of thing," she went on. "It isn't flattery to tell you that—you see it yourself every night—I saw it, and that's why I— Oh, Cyril, let's try to get where you belong."

"You don't understand," he said moodily. "You don't understand a bit. I had all that once, and I kicked it over. The stage is an awfully small place—for anybody that amounts to anything, you know—though as big as an ocean for the others. There isn't anybody of importance—manager or star—who doesn't *hate* me." He perceived the doubt in her glance, and continued swiftly: "Oh, it's no conspiracy, or jealousy, or anything of that kind—a tip-top man can override all that if there's money in him for the box-office—but I've set them all against me. There isn't one I haven't punched or insulted somehow. I hold the record for being the best-detested man on Broadway. Why, Alfred Fielman once—that was six years ago, when I was by way of being a metropolitan favorite, and all that, ha, ha—he had me on a forty weeks' contract, and at the end of three he gave me a check for the rest and told me he had no more use for my services. Thirty-seven weeks' full salary—think of it—and the door!"

"But isn't it different now?" asked Phyllis, enfolding him with a pair of the whitest, softest, shapeliest arms in the world, and pressing her cheek against his face. "You've got good since then, and are now mama's little man!"

"Look at last night," protested mama's little man dismally. "Drinking, fighting, gambling, and my job out of the window! That's been me right along—two weeks' notice, and for God's sake, never come back!"

"Just a damned goat," rippled Phyllis, her teeth shining like pearls, and her cheeks dimpling mischievously.

"A silly ass," ejaculated Adair with much self-contempt.

"Now, I want to tell you my idea," cried Phyllis. "We're going to pack up, poor booful disgraced genius—and wife (as they add on hotel registers); and we're going to count our poor little pennies, and take a tourist sleeper to New York, and get a little flat of the sort they rent to dormice in reduced circumstances, and live

on air and kisses and hope—while poor Booful will go round telling everybody he’s a reformed character, and looking for an engagement. And if the top all hates him, and if the middle is all full, why Booful will begin at the bottom, while Mrs. Booful will wash, and cook, and darn his socks—oh, no, listen,—yes, and darn his socks, and pet him when he is discouraged and cross, and keep everything scrupulously clean (in books if you’re awfully poor, you’re always scrupulously clean, haven’t you noticed it)? Yes, scrupulously clean, and oh, so economical of every nickel till everybody begins to see that Booful isn’t a damned goat, but a man of splendid talent, and up, up, up he’ll go like a balloon, till there won’t be a garbage-can without his name on it, or a bill-board without somebody “presenting” him in letters six feet high, and fame and money will pour in like a Niagara, and, and—Cyril, why shouldn’t we?”

His look of indulgence and amusement had gradually changed to downright eagerness.

“If you can stand it, I can,” he said.

“Oh, Cyril, I’m not afraid—let’s do it!”

“We’ll be starvation poor.”

“But in a home of our own—no more of these horrid hotels, no more traveling, and something big to live and hope for.”

“Those dormice flats are awfully squeezey—and dark.”

“So’s a robin’s nest, for that matter.”

“And those pretty hands—it would be wicked to spoil them.”

“Oh, I won’t spoil them—besides, what would be the good of them if they couldn’t work for the man I love.”

“Scrubbing floors, and cleaning kettles and polishing the stove?”

“You can help a little.”

“And suppose, instead of being easy, it’s very hard? It takes courage to start again. You’ll have to be brave enough for two, for I’ve none of that kind of grit or perseverance. Do you think you can bolster up a great big fellow like me, who’ll come home like a baby and cry?”

“We’ll bolster up each other.”

“I—I wish I was more worthy of you, Phyllis.”

“Stop kissing my toes—it tickles—and oh, Cyril, don’t bite them!”

“I’m ashamed—you are so sweet and good and clever and brave—and the whole of me isn’t worth that little pink one, and I don’t think I’ve ever loved you so much as I do this minute, or *respected* you more. If you were married to a street-car conductor I believe you’d make him president of the United States—and if your husband mayn’t bite you, who can?”

“You darling!”

“And I swear by that one that I love you better than anything in the world;

and by that one I'll be true to you all my life; and by that one I'll cut my tongue out before I'll ever say an unkind word to you again; and by that one I'm going to do everything you say, just as though you were an angel from Heaven, which you are if ever there was one; and by that fat little big toe that I'm going to try to copy the tenderest, gentlest, most exquisite nature that God ever breathed into a human being; and by the whole chubby little white satin foot--"

"Do sit up--it's important."

"I thought it was all settled. We'll start for New York as soon as I am fired--officially."

"Cyril?"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"I'm so infatuated with you that perhaps I don't see things as they are. It is not a dream, is it, that you really could get on in New York--I mean if you lived down all the ill will against you there? I try to detach myself, and criticize you dispassionately--but you always seem to me so tremendously good."

"I am good--in my own kind of work."

"You've no dread of failure?"

"In handing out the goods--? Not a particle, Phyllis. Why should I? Haven't I done it?"

"In your New York days?"

"Why, Phyllis, this isn't brag. I've got notices to show for it, corking notices. What you have seen me do is not my best. No one could do that with the support I get, and I have to carry the whole outfit single handed. A company ought to be a string orchestra--and they give me a brass band!"

"Have you got the notices?--I'd love to see them!"

"They're at the bottom of the trunk somewhere--three books of them."

"Do get them out, and let me read some."

After long rummaging the books were produced. Phyllis, who in the interval had put on a peignoir, and begun to comb her hair, seized on one of them enthusiastically. It was an unwieldy, shabby old volume, and so heavy it was hard to hold. The exertion, and perhaps the excitement had caused Adair's head to throb again, and he was glad to stretch his length on the bed while Phyllis, drawing up a rocking chair, seated herself as close as she could beside him.

The actor had not exaggerated his past successes. For three seasons he had been a notable figure on Broadway, and if his reputation had been more one of promise than achievement it was in dazzling contrast to what he had since become. He had himself almost forgotten the stir he had made--not the deafening curtain calls, the brimming box-offices, the deferential managers,--none could forget that--but the soberer, yet more valuable evidence of the critics. It was electrifying to listen to them again; to see across the mean, intervening years

that other self of his lording it so high; to realize, with mingled bitterness, wonder and hope that he was still the same man, with the same if not richer powers, and a new-born resolution to regain what he had so lightly valued and so unconcernedly thrown away.

Phyllis, pink with excitement, and tripping occasionally over the longer words, read notice after notice with indefatigable zest, constantly substituting Booful and other endearing epithets for the more formal name in print, while her husband lay back, listening delightedly, and contributing exclamations, "By George, and it was William Winter who said that!"—"Say, that's Huneker, isn't it?" "A column in *The World* isn't handed out to everybody, not by a long sight."

BOOFUL OPENS AT WALLACK'S  
THE HONOR OF THE REGIMENT PLEASES, BUT  
NEEDS CUTTING.  
THE STAR SCORES AS MOODY HERO, AND EXCELS  
HIMSELF IN MAGNIFICENT PORTRAYAL OF  
EBHARDT.

"Those who went last night to see *Booful* were not disappointed, however they may have disagreed about the play itself. For that brilliant young *darling* it was hardly less than a personal triumph, and from the rise of the curtain—"

It was a very inconsiderate moment for a heavy rap at the door.

"Come in," cried Adair.

In the shadow stood a bulky figure—a blue figure—a figure with something shining on its swelling chest. Phyllis looked and quailed as the bravest of us do at the sight of the Law, intruding its hob-nailed boot into what is metaphorically termed our castle. In this case the castle was so small, and the Law so large and red and impressive that the former seemed but a trifling refuge against oppression. In the accents of a green and troubled island the new-comer asked: "Are you Misther Adair—Misther Surul Adair?"

"That's me, all right," said the actor.

"You're summonsed for assault and battery, and here's the payper, and it's before Judge Dunn ye're to come at two o'clock."

"Where do I go, officer?"

"The city hall, police court number one."

"Two o'clock, you say? Very good. Tell Judge Dunn I have much pleasure in accepting his kind invitation."

The functionary unbent genially.

"Tay will be served on the lawn," he said, "and the Marine Band will be in attendance, and some of our younger set will be there—in blue."

It seemed incredible to poor, trembling Phyllis that Adair could burst out laughing. But he did, and that with every indication of undiminished spirits.

"All right, officer, I'll be there."

"Good morning, sorr."

"Good morning, officer."

The tears were streaming down Phyllis' face as she ran to Adair, and threw her arms around his neck; but he caressed and comforted her, and gradually got her to smile again.

"I feel better," he said. "Be a dear, and make me some fresh coffee.—Oh, Phyllis, isn't it jolly!"

"Jolly? Oh, how can you—"

"Oh, I mean about going back to New York! A fellow who's hit them once can hit them again, and by George, with you to help me, I just know I'm bound to land!"

"But this awful police court!"

"Don't worry about that—they've never hanged a Free Mason yet.—Easy with the cream, sweetheart.—Where was it we left off? Oh, yes, here it is: 'Adair opens at Wallack's. Those who went last night to see Cyril Adair—'"

[image]

*From the Leamington Courier of November 28th, 190—*  
*AMUSING SCENE IN JUDGE DUNN'S COURT*

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*AMUSING SCENE IN JUDGE DUNN'S COURT*

Yesterday the proceedings in Judge Dunn's court were enlivened by the presence of Cyril Adair the actor, who, on the complaint of Jacob Steinberger, his manager, and Messrs. Willard Latimer and George Augustus Wright, brother players, was haled before the bar of justice for assault and battery. The three complainants showed unmistakable traces of a fistic encounter, and there was a subdued ripple of merriment at their bandaged appearance. The encounter was the outcome of a midnight game of poker, and there was a direct conflict of evidence as to who began the fray.

Judge Dunn finally summed up against the defendant, and in default of a fine, ordered him to find personal security to be of good behavior for three months. Much amusement was then caused by Mrs. Adair unexpectedly stepping forward, and pleading most charmingly with the judge to permit her to assume the obligation. The court was unable to resist so attractive a bit of femininity, and though remarking it was somewhat irregular, consented, amid general laughter, to grant her request.

The judge made up for it, however, by giving the defendant a stiff little lecture before dismissing the case, expressing his surprise that the husband of so young and pretty a wife should care to pass the early morning hours at poker and fisticuffs. Adair accepted the rebuke with great good nature and prompted by his wife thanked his honor for his forbearance, adding to the general hilarity by repeating aloud some of the advice that was being whispered in his ear. Apologies followed outside, and the whole party returned to their hotel in the same hack. All's well that ends well!

## CHAPTER XX

Adair waited until Christmas before severing his connection with Steinberger. The holidays were bad for theatrical business, and the prospect of a temporarily reduced salary and several extra matinées seemed to make this period an auspicious one for departure. With two hundred and eighty dollars, their trunks, the clothes they stood in, and hearts beating high with eagerness and hope, the pair took the train for the City of Success.

Even on their way to it their respective positions began to change. The actor, for all his broad shoulders and big voice and commanding presence, betrayed from the first a helplessness and dependence that both pleased and surprised his little wife. He anxiously deferred to her in everything; fell in readily with every suggestion; listened with profound respect to her plans. He knew New York inside out; poverty was no stranger to him, nor the makeshifts and struggles of the poor; yet in the crisis of their fortunes it was the girl that took the lead—the girl who had never suffered a single privation in her life, who had been reared in luxury, to whom money and ease were as the air she breathed.

Left to his own unguided will Adair would have gravitated to a dingy bedroom in a dingy boarding-house. It was Phyllis who perceived the greater free-

dom, and the unspeakably greater comfort and charm of a tiny apartment. The nest-making instinct was strong in her, and also the bred-in-the-bone belief that it was the woman's place to guard her man's well-being, and to send him forth to work in the best of trim. She did not know how to cook; she had never swept out a room in her life, she had never even folded a table-cloth, yet her self-assurance and determination never wavered. All this could be learned—pooh, it only needed hard work and intelligence,—she would answer for its being the nicest little flat in New York, and would dismiss Adair every morning in his best clothes, smiling, well-fed, and happy, to look for an engagement.

Brave, confident little heart! Intent little head absorbed in calculations; magic the love that could cast effulgence over those soiled green notes, and the phantom gray city, and the man, none too good, or wise on whom such a treasure of devotion was lavished! But some conception of it pierced his thick skin, and what there was in him that was unselfish and noble felt disquieted at the contrast, and strangely stirred and humbled.

"Phyllis," he said huskily, "I—I didn't know what love meant until I met you. I guess lots of men go all their lives and never know. I've been sitting back here, thinking how nearly I might have missed it."

"And getting quite scared and worried?—The poor precious! If it wasn't for the conductor and that bald-headed man who's sure we're not married, because I put my feet on the seat, and wear red stockings—I'd kiss you right now, and give you a gurgle hug!"

"There are lots like me," Adair went on with unaffected seriousness, "but, Phyllis, there is only one of you. I suppose people are born like that sometimes—just one of them—and there aren't any more.—When we get round to it, we must have children; you mustn't be allowed to die and disappear; it wouldn't be right by the world."

Phyllis wrote down: "Pair tea-cups and saucers, thirty cents," and announced that in the meanwhile the world would have to wait, as one couldn't do everything at once. She added a duster to the list and a pie-pan, while a smile hovered at the corners of her lips. It impelled her to press her knee against Adair's, and whisper something so sparkingly improper that he blushed. Then she returned to housekeeping considerations with a pleased and saucy air, never so happy as when she had embarrassed him.

Accommodation for dormice, although plentiful, left much to be desired, except for dormice fond of grubbiness, gloom, and ill-smelling passages and halls. For dormice willing to live on One-hundred-and-jump-off-the-earth Street there was light and air, and reasonably sized rooms, and even skimpy glimpses of the

Hudson. But Cyril wished to be near the theater district and the Thespian Club of which he was a member, and this restricted their choice to below Fifty-ninth Street. Heavens, what innumerable janitors they raised from the depths, what miles and miles of stairs they climbed, what desperate moments of indecision they endured, as, utterly spent, the precious deposit was nearly tempted from their pockets!

At last, however, at the tail of the most offensive little man in New York, whose questions included the likelihood or not of an increase in the family, and who had to be specifically assured that his new tenants meditated starting neither a bagnio nor a sweatshop, nor were going to teach music, or keep naphtha on the premises—at the tail of this personage, who at every step remembered some fresh prohibition, and some fresh possibility, the ideal was reached on the seventh floor of a house between Second and Third Avenue. It was a box of a place—sitting-room, bedroom, kitchen and bath—but shiny new, and with every window open to the sun, and Fifty-eighth Street to look out on instead of some dismal rear. It was taken at twenty-one dollars a month; their trunks followed them in; and they camped out their second night in New York on the bare boards of their new home.

With all our talk of the value of money very few of us have any conception of it. How many at least could believe that a small apartment in New York could be furnished, and prettily furnished, for a hundred and fifty dollars? On a doll-baby scale, of course, with pictures taken from the ten cent weeklies, and framed in blue creton and the same invaluable material accomplishing wonders over packing cases, improvised into wash-stands, bureaus and seats. Phyllis sent Adair off to the club, and set to work alone. She did not want him to see her dirty, tousled, and wearing an old dressing-gown of his in that chaos of disorder; though she presented a sweeter figure than she knew on her knees beside the pail, and scrubbing the floor like a little stage soubrette, or hammering creton with her mouth full of tacks and an inspired expression that would have befitted a Madonna. She was too girlish, too young, for anything to harm her beauty, and so gay and charming that all who came fell under her spell. Gawky messengers helped to move boxes, nail down matting, and elucidate the mysteries of setting up a bed. The janitor's wife, a faded German woman with gentle eyes and a soft voice, and all the European's respect for caste, insisted on joining in; and when, Phyllis, with difficulty and some shame, managed to explain she was unable to pay for such services, the creature kissed her hand, and redoubled her exertions. Beauty is a power everywhere, and if the poor can not pay its toll in compliments, they can wash windows, clean up litter, and carry an offering of frankfurters and sauerkraut up six flights of stairs; and with many an "Ach" and "lieber Gott" urge the little "high-born" to rest and eat.

And so amid kindness and good will, the tiny apartment was got into shape, while the dark wild days without turned to snow, and the frosted panes showed nothing through but white and desolation. The dormice lay snug in their nest, and though their money ebbed, and the cupboard was next to bare, and the household work at times weighed hardly on unaccustomed, slender shoulders, perhaps they were too near Heaven to complain.

Adair had never been a very respectable nor popular member of the Thespian Club, that influential organization from which the New York stage is so largely recruited; and the return of the lost sheep was not accompanied by any particular enthusiasm. But Adair was too noticeable a man, and his talent too well remembered for his presence not to cause some stir, and soon there was comment on his extraordinary change for the better. He was certainly no longer the loud, swaggering, over-dressed Adair of the old days, with the dubious geniality, and the restless eyes. He did not drink; he seemed to have lost his surly streak; in many other ways more indefinite he had softened and improved. The Thespians, who were nothing if not good-natured and generous, very willingly let bygones be bygones, and some of the more important began to suggest his name to managers.

But the managers were made of sterner stuff than the actors and playwrights; they had longer memories, and skins that still smarted. They brightened at the name of Adair for the unexpected pleasure it gave them to say "No." Each had his special wrong to avenge, each his emphatic and passionate denunciation of a man they abominated. "I've only two rules in running my theaters," said Mr. Fielman. "The first is to give the public the best that money can buy; the second, never to engage Mr. Cyril Adair!"—Mr. Paw went further: "My poy, they say in our peeziness that the box-office talks, but if it said Adair all day and all night, I'd sooner get out and sell shoe-laces on the street than see his damn sneering face in any broduction of mine!" Niedringer was no more encouraging, and the Fordingham Brothers were curt and profane.

But the New York theatrical world is a big one; and these giants, while of enormous importance, do not rule all the roost. There are always new producers bobbing up; stars themselves make ventures into management and branch out; many others, independent on a smaller scale, choose the companies that support them. Then there are the second class houses, the vaudeville houses, the stock companies—all requiring an army of professional people. Then, too, hardly a season passes without several incoming actors from some woolly, wild, unheard-of region, arriving, full of eagerness to add Broadway laurels to brows already crowned in Teepee City or Nuggetville, Nevada. Add to these, imported English companies with the lesser parts often unfilled, and "angels," both male and female, with barrels of money for some stagestruck pet, who, desirous of a short cut to

greatness, insists on beginning (and usually ending) at the top;—and you will have some small conception of what New York is—theatrically.

Adair did not despair. Not only was the atmosphere of the Thespian Club too redolent of success for that, but he was sustained besides by a couple of small offers which he received for the "road." Determined though he was to appear on Broadway, it was good for his courage and perseverance to have these engagements to refuse. They served to take the edge off the rebuffs he constantly experienced, and gave him something not altogether mournful to reflect on as he waited interminable hours in agents' and managers' anterooms. Not but what there were times when it was almost unendurable. Rejection, with an actor, carries with it a personal mortification; and his air of fashion, his nosegay, his smartly folded overcoat, his affected jauntiness—all intensify by their contrast the bitterness of his lot. He slinks off with pitiful bravado, and eyes suspiciously bright, to pull himself together for another attempt at another place, as dispirited a figure as any to be seen under heaven.

While Adair, with an effort as clumsy as it was touching, strove to hide his disappointment from his wife, and put by in their little home a steadily deepening sense of failure—she, on her side, was keeping him in ignorance of a matter that troubled her exceedingly. Her father had begun to write to her, but in such a way that a reconciliation, instead of becoming nearer, seemed more remote and impossible than ever. With all his tenderness and longing, and almost pathetic appeal "to be friends again," he was unable to resist taking flings at Adair. His hatred for the man came out in implications and covert allusions Phyllis could not forgive. Ostensibly holding out the olive branch, his letters served instead to heighten the estrangement, for behind everything was his conviction it was simply her pride that kept them apart; that having made a mess of her life, and committed an irreparable folly, she was defiantly accepting the misery she had brought down upon herself. That she was insanely happy—that she adored her husband—that neither poverty nor hardship counted a jot in her decision—all these to Mr. Ladd were incredibilities.—Yet the same story dressed up for him on the stage or in a book, would have won his sympathy, and reached his heart.—Of such inconsistencies are we made, and the poor puppets are cried over when flesh and blood is denied.

Of course, Phyllis was abnormally sensitive. Had her husband secured a good engagement, and some recognition she would have been in a more receptive mind to receive her father's advances. But Adair's unspoken anxiety, their diminishing money, their meager meals and the need that they had to take account of every penny—here were so many reasons to accentuate her critical faculties.—And this to be held as a proof that she had been "dragged down" was altogether too much. At first, full of eagerness and over many a closely-written page she

had tried to explain matters to her father; but his disbelief was chilling, and from hopelessness her feelings gradually changed to anger. For a couple of weeks she had kept the thousand-dollar check he had sent her, hoping that he would so far relent toward Adair that she might accept it without disloyalty. Then, chagrined, she had returned it, though her extremity was bitter, and the tears dripped over the letter that bore it back. No reconciliation was possible that did not include her husband, or that was offered to him contemptuously and grudgingly. If this were impossible she begged her father to write no more, and spare her further suffering. His answer was as unreasonable as the others, and he contrived to wound even while he thought he was conceding everything.

His next letter she sent back unopened, and also the one after that. Then there were no more, and the postman's whistle presaged nothing after that but a post card from Tommy. These, with pictures of a local court house, or a new Masonic building, or some bald park, were almost daily visitors. But they spoke of affection and remembrance, and to a sad heart were not without their comfort.

Early one afternoon the sound of the key in the lock warned her that Adair had unexpectedly returned. His face announced his good news before he could so much as utter a word, and then the facts came out in a panting, breathless torrent. Shamus O'Dowd—she knew Shamus O'Dowd, the Irish comedian?—No?—What, never heard of Shamus O'Dowd?—Well, anyway, O'Dowd was at the Herald Square—big business—seats selling three weeks in advance—*A Broth of a Boy*, you know—and the fellow who was playing Captain Carleton had dropped out, and the understudy wasn't satisfactory—and—and—it was seventy-five dollars a week—and here were the lines—and you could have knocked him over with a feather when O'Dowd came right up to him at the club, and fixed it up in five minutes, and they had run through a rehearsal to give him a notion of the business, and it was a damned good character part, and—then, I wonder if that twenty-one dollar apartment had ever seen the like—with Phyllis sitting in Booful's lap, and her arms tight around his neck, and talking two to his one, all rapture and exclamations as though he had done something extraordinary instead of merely getting a job; and Booful, no less proud and foolish and excited felt, too, he had done something extraordinary, holding to the lines as though they were a patent of nobility, and crazy to begin the study of them; and describing the play with such humor and absurdity that his little wife thought she had never heard anything so funny in her life, her teeth shining as she laughed and laughed—especially at O'Dowd, who was described as fifty, with a bull-neck, and ever too much of him in front and behind, with a very short coat, and bounding fat legs, and such a *Broth of a Boy* that he was ready to fight or dance or sing or make love at the

drop of a hat, and generally to caper from sheer exuberance of Irish youth.—Then Booful turned suddenly serious, and got up, and said that on no, no account was he to be disturbed, and began to pace like a lion up and down the doll-baby sitting-room, mumbling his part to himself with a far-away expression, and an occasional frown and swear as he missed a word; while Phyllis, pretending to sew, squeezed herself into a corner, and made as though she was not watching him, which she did in timid little peeps, thinking how handsome he was and noble and manly and splendid, with such returning recollections of his devotion, and gentleness, and simple, unrepining courage in the hard days now fast finishing, that she could have swooned from very tenderness.

*A Broth of a Boy* was a typical Irish drama. The central figure was a rollicking imbecile, with a tuneful voice and the customary shillelah, who foils the wicked mortgager, chucks colleens under the chin, does a hair-raising leap over a waterfall, and is altogether so Brothy and gay that no one can resist him. The usual British officer, condemned to carry out an unpalatable order, and falling under the spell of a pair of saucy Irish eyes, is found not to be half so bad a fellow as we had anticipated; and though a good deal of a booby, and the target for sarcasms that he is too obtusely English to perceive, gradually wins the toleration and even the affection of the gallery. In real life he would probably have been court-martialed for his arrant disregard of instructions, nor would a bare-legged milk-maid have been considered quite the prize the dramatist deemed her.—But one mustn't criticize this dreamy region too harshly. That great baby, the public, loves it,—and in the theater-world there is plenty of room for this grotesque Ireland, and always will be; and baby's patronage feeds many worthy and deserving people, who otherwise might have not a little trouble of it to live.

Yes, let us be lenient toward the Irish drama. It brought seventy-five dollars a week to that little apartment high up in East Fifty-eighth Street, and hope and courage to hearts that were beginning to falter.

## CHAPTER XXI

In the whole house that night of Adair's return to Broadway there was probably but one person in front who was even aware that the bill had been changed. That rapt little spectator waited with her heart in her mouth for the actor's appearance, and thrilled herself with fairy tales while the play ponderously opened, and took

its course. Adair would be recognized; there would be a wild demonstration of welcome; cheers, applause, yes, an ovation, with people standing up, and the gallery in an uproar!—It was a dream, of course, a phantasy, for her head was too squarely set on her shoulders to count on anything of the sort, but nevertheless it exhilarated her enough to make the reality doubly, trebly disappointing.

His entrance was unheralded by a single handclap, O'Dowd having just retired amid thunders, with part of the audience still insistently humming the refrain of *Sweet Kitty O'Rourke*, (words by Stevowsky; music by Cohen). Adair's first few lines were altogether lost in consequence, the scene beginning in vehement pantomime, and the house only gradually, and with extreme unwillingness, resigning itself to the exit of the star. It must be said they had some right to regret him. Adair was anxious and forced, and so desperately in earnest to be funny that he suggested a marionette. Phyllis' surprise turned to dismay, and dismay to an inexpressible pain. That he won many a boorish laugh only heightened her misery. It was worse than bad, it was common, and she could have bent down and cried in very shame. But in the throes of her despair she was watchful, and her pretty brows corrugated with the intensity of her attention. Poor though the part was, surely it could be done better, oh, so much better; and if only she dared—! An infinite compassion dimmed her eyes, an infinite pity, for was it not for her he had stooped to this vile clowning, debasing himself, blowing out his cheeks like a turkey-gobbler, feverishly catching at every trick to get a grin or a titter? All this sacrifice of dignity, manhood and self-respect to keep the poor little pot boiling on Fifty-eighth Street?

It was terrible to sit through the play, and to realize with more and more conviction that this sacrifice was unnecessary—that the rôle, straightforwardly acted, and the comic-policeman side of it ignored, might be made into something worth doing—not very much worth doing of course—but still redeemed from utter banality. But Phyllis knew how her husband bristled at the least touch of criticism. Ordinarily so loving and indulgent, a single word of disapprobation could set him off like an hysterical woman; before now she had inadvertently raised such storms, and looked back on them with terror. She asked herself what she was to do, and could find no answer. Everything in her revolted from lying to him, and yet she would be forced to. It was not cowardice, but the disinclination of seeing him suffer, and the dread of incurring the harshness and anger of the man she idolized. Enmity in his eyes seemed to strike her to the ground; her heart stopped beating; something seemed to die within her.—No, at any cost, she must lie, lie, lie.

She waited for him at the stage-door, a slight dejected figure under the gaslights, and conscious for the first time that her clothes were shabby, and that her gloves were old and worn. O'Dowd's carriage stood by, and she envied the

coachman his warm fur collar, and with it came the thought of all she had given up to marry Adair. This put her in better spirits, for she was pleased with everything that enhanced her love, and gave it an unusual and romantic quality—so that for a moment she seemed less cold, less sad, and a delicious heroine-feeling enshrouded her. Had it not been for the fear of what was to come she would have been altogether happy. But a pang of apprehension shot through her, and all the pretty fancies engendered by the fur collar of a sudden disappeared.—She was again standing on the wintry street, tired, frightened, and disheartened.

Adair emerged in a jubilant humor, and squeezed her arm as he passed his own through hers, and moved in the direction of the cars. Boisterous and gay, he was in no mood to notice Phyllis' constraint, and took her approval for granted as he overflowed with talk. It was a great relief to her to remain silent, and nestle close to all that bigness and confidence, and be borne along by that strong arm. All her doubts and fears were lost in an unreasoning gladness, and what did anything matter but love?

Meanwhile the genial tide of Adair's discourse continued without intermission.—O'Dowd, who was a prince of good fellows, had patted him on the back. Eddie Phelps was up in the air, too, and said he had simply walked away from the other man—and oh, how good it was to be in a theater again! It was a piffling part, but after all it was something to have made the best of it, to have shown them what could be done in it by a first class man. That was the beauty of the stage—a real actor could take a janitor or an organ-grinder and create a lot out of nothing. Did she know that all that business in the second act was his?—Yes, positively—every bit of it his, and no wonder O'Dowd hugged him at the wings, and said it was great—yes, just like that—before everybody! You see, it had pulled up the whole thing where it had used to drag, giving it zip and go. Eddie Phelps said that the other fellow had never got a hand there. He had done better than that, hadn't he? And if it hadn't been such a damned feeder for the star—oh, well, success was success, if it were only an inch high!

In this strain of self-laudation, Adair boarded a car, and praised himself all the way home. Throughout he took Phyllis' concurrence for granted, and his exuberance was unclouded by the least suspicion of the truth. He had half finished his supper when with that instinct which was one of the most unexpected endowments of his character, he all at once perceived something to be amiss. It wasn't Phyllis' fault; she had given not a hint of dissatisfaction; nothing was further from her thoughts than to mar that night.

But when he laid down his knife and fork, and stared at her across the table she knew in an instant what was coming.

"My God, Phyllis," he exclaimed, "it is not possible you—you didn't like it?"

She would have given worlds for the lie that would not come; her eyes

[image]

*It is not possible you—you didn't like it?—Page 287*

shrank from his; the sincerity and conviction of his tone made deceit impossible. It was almost in a whisper that she answered: "Oh, Cyril, Cyril,—I'm afraid I didn't."

He pushed away his plate and got up; he could not suffer such a mortification sitting; the flat itself seemed too small to hold his sudden shame, his agitation, the staggering shock of what seemed to him his wife's disloyalty.

"What was the matter with it?" he demanded passionately. "What was it you did not like?—No, no, you needn't try to wriggle out of it; you've said too much to stop now; you've as good as told me it was damned bad, and I want to know why.—The words don't matter; it isn't a question of how you put it, nor how much I mind being knocked by the one person on earth—! My God, Phyllis, what do you mean by saying I was bad?"

She was terrified. No culprit in the dock ever trembled more guiltily, or faced a brow-beating prosecutor with so stricken a look. Her husband's bitter and contemptuous tone cut her like a lash. But it was too late now to make excuses, to palliate the offense. There was nothing for it but to go on—to justify herself—and the better she could do it the more she would wound him! And all this on a night that surely ought to have been their happiest.

"You made the captain too—too common," she stammered. "He is supposed to be a high-bred, aristocratic man—stupid, of course—but a gentleman through and through. In real life—"

"Oh, real life!" he interrupted roughly, "that's where all you ignorant, criticizing people go wrong. He has nothing to do with real life—he's a preposterous stage figure, a convention. I have to take what I'm given; I'm not the dramatist; I can't write new lines for him, can I? My business is to hide the strings that pull his arms and legs, and make him possible—and by George, I did it!"

"But Cyril, dearest, listen—even when you first come on you're not polite enough, not chivalrous enough. You almost burst out laughing at—"

"That's to give contrast to him afterwards."

"But you can do that, and still keep him a gen—I mean nice, and—"

This was all she was allowed to say. Adair towered over her, convulsed, shaking, his voice hardly governable as he stormed and raged. It was the best thing he had ever done; it was perfect; there was fifteen years of stage experience in that one creation. It was awful that it should all go for nothing; it shook

his nerve; it shook his confidence in himself; he hardly knew how he could go on playing the part. He wouldn't, he'd throw it up; he warned her to be more careful next time, or as an actor he would be done for. It wasn't that he was afraid of criticism—intelligent criticism—he welcomed intelligent criticism—the criticism of those who knew the stage—helpful criticism. But to club a man in this ignorant, crass way was simply to murder him. How could he ever bear to let her see him again in anything? He was sensitive; he was cruelly sensitive; it was because he had temperament; and if he couldn't please the person he liked he had no courage or heart left, even if he set the whole house crazy. Here was one of the best things he had ever done, killed for ever—and it was she who had killed it! It was the penalty of loving her that he could not go on without her approval; he knew she was wrong; in any one else he would have dismissed it with a shrug, and forgotten it the next minute; yet with her—! Perhaps this sounds more ignominious than it was. To Phyllis at least there was a great pathos in the exasperated outburst that was very far from being due to vanity alone. The revelation of her husband's weakness, of his utter dependence on her good opinion, atoned not a little for the violent things he said. It enlarged her understanding of the childishness that lies so close beneath the artist-nature—of its swift extremes of feeling—and showed her, too, the amazing intensity that Adair put even into a small rôle, and taught her afresh what a life and death matter the stage was to him. His frenzy, therefore, instead of rousing her resentment, and worse still her scorn and anger, rather quickened within her a tragic pity. His burning face, his dilating eyes, his quivering twitching mouth—all the evidences of an uncontrollable mortification—brought forth instead that womanly feeling, so rich in generosity and indulgence, that would sacrifice everything for the one it loved.

To prove that she was right seemed to her of much less importance just then than to smooth down that wild, distraught man-creature who belonged to her. With love in peril all other considerations were swept away. No pride stood between, no sense of injustice; love was too precious for such pettinesses to interfere.—Then with what piteous artifices she began to eat her words! How adroitly did she argue so that her surrender should not be too apparent, giving way by such fine gradations that Adair hardly suspected the imposture. How contritely she confessed herself in the wrong, her cringing little heart all submission, her whole young body eager to atone her fault.—The wild, distraught man-creature was by degrees coaxed back to tameness and sanity; the thunders subsided; with kisses and caresses he was even prevailed upon to resume his place at table, where, lecturing her masterfully as he ate, though with a steadily lessening severity, dormice peace was at length restored. By the time Phyllis had brought him his slippers, lit his cigar, and snuggled herself against his knees, like a sweet little Circassian who had disturbed her Bashaw, and had been gra-

ciously forgiven by that dearest and best of men, Adair mellowed sufficiently to feel some slight self-reproach. He apologized for having got so worked up; fondled her glossy hair; called her his darling little stupid whom he loved so well he couldn't endure her to find fault with him. Between whiffs, mellowing even more, he admitted that he might have been slightly unreasonable, even unkind, but put it all down to his disappointment at failing to please her. "I worked so hard," he said. "I just fell over myself to make them laugh. I-I had to think of the seventy-five, you know, and holding down the job; and as the others liked it, I-I thought you would. My sweetheart girl must try and make some allowances. I couldn't help feeling cross and nervous and all worked up-and, and, it's awful to fail, Phyllis."

She, at this, the naughty little hypocrite, would have eaten more humble pie; would have protested afresh that it was only one tiny-winy thing she had objected to-though even on that she wasn't half as sure as she had been. But Adair cut her short. In his softened humor he was prepared to concede something to her criticism; there was a speck of truth in what she had said, however much it had upset him; he was going to pull up the part a bit; he was-

Phyllis had sprung up, and darted into the bedroom, with so sparkling a smile, and with such an air of animation and mystery that Adair hardly knew what to make of it all. But he was accustomed to her girlish escapades, and lay back with his cigar, listening to bureau-drawers being hastily opened and shut, and awaiting developments with amused anticipation. She could be such a little devil when the fancy seized her, and rejoiced in the most shocking exhibitions for his private delectation. He was unprepared, however, for her to bound out in a suit of his own, the sleeves and trousers rolled up, and her hair half-hidden beneath a jaunty cap. She had made herself up for Captain Carleton, and the moment she opened her mouth Adair recognized the fine parody of himself in the rôle. The words she had pat, her retentive memory having caught and retained them during his laborious "study"; and while she was less sure of the imaginary milk-maid, she paraphrased the latter's lines with sufficient accuracy to keep her cues straight. She knew she was playing with fire; her face was a picture of mingled roguishness and terror, yet she was impelled by a headlong daring that was irresistible.

She flung herself into the scene with mad abandonment, mimicking his voice, his gestures, his laugh, the very way he leaned against the pasteboard gate-a whirlwind little figure, dancing crazily on the egg-shells of his vanity. It was the cleverest, wickedest, most unsparing travesty of his whole performance, carried through with inordinate zest and mischief, and heightened by a slim young beauty that had never seemed to him more alluring. Her little feet had never looked so small as with the coarse trousers flapping about her ankles; the au-

dacious curves above intensified her sex; while the partly opened coat displayed the ribbons and lace of her night-dress beneath—the whole a vision of captivating girlhood.

Adair at first made no sign at all except to stare at her in a sort of stupefaction. His face grew so dark that she felt shivers running down her back, and for a moment she wondered if she had not mortally offended him. The first smile she wooed from him set her pulses dancing with relief. Yes, he was smiling, he was laughing, he was clapping his hands; and then, oh, the joy of it, he was bursting out with great, deep "Ha, ha's" of delight! Thus encouraged, she redoubled her exertions; she outdid herself; she was in the second scene now, and was tearing it to pieces like a puppy with a rag-doll, panting with excitement and success, and rapturous with victory. Adair jumped up, and in a paroxysm of admiration, passion, exultation and self-reproach, ran and crushed her in his arms. Phyllis felt the filmy lace-stuff rip asunder, and his lips seeking her flesh, while all incoherent he breathed out that he loved her, loved her, loved her, and that she was right; yes, he had been playing it all wrong; never would he go against her judgment again, and then and there took back every word he had said! He was just a vain, silly, conceited, swollen-up jackass, not even worth her finger-tip; and he couldn't forgive himself for the way he had treated her; and the only thing he could think of doing to show how badly he felt was to plump down and kiss her little slippers, which he forthwith did with a humility that would have been more impressive had there been a less frantic flurry of kicks and protests.

Thus the evening that had begun so ill ended in tenderness and profound accord. The very last thing Mr. Dormouse murmured as he lay locked in his wife's arms was that she was the cleverest little actress in the world, and pretty enough to eat, and a million times too good for him—which on the whole was the truest thing Dormouse had said for a long while, and showed that his ideas were improving. Little though he knew it he was improving in every way, and could he have set himself back six months he would have been astounded at the contrast. Women make men in other senses than the physical, and this robust lump of egoism, selfishness, ignorance and conceit was being slowly and unconsciously transformed. Something of Phyllis was passing into him, and in the magic of that soul-infiltration the grosser side of him had begun to crumble.

## CHAPTER XXII

It is disappointing to chronicle that the altered and improved rendering of the English captain passed almost unnoticed. Mr. Kemmel, O'Dowd's right-hand man, indeed had objected to the change; and failing to bully Adair into submission had carried the affair up to the star. But that comedian, with a kindness that bordered on a sublime indifference, refused to interfere. "Hell, it don't matter how he plays it as long as he gets the words over," was his sage comment; and a wave of a large, fat hand dismissed the subject for ever. O'Dowd had his own private reasons for wishing to stay on good terms with Adair, which he was too regal, if not too cautious, to pass on at that moment to Mr. Kemmel. O'Dowd, being star, manager, and half-author of the piece was minting money under all three heads, and his concern for the box-office was proportionately great—so great that he could consider the choice of an understudy without irritation, and even accept a man who might "draw."

On first being commanded to understudy his principal, Adair had accepted the task much in the spirit of Mary Ann, when she is told: "Oh, I forgot to say you must do the washing, too!" It was a drudgery and a bore that he would have been well content to avoid, for one look at O'Dowd's red face and vigorous frame convinced him of the remoteness of the contingency for which he was to fit himself. He set no hopes in that direction, and it came to him as a real surprise, a couple of weeks after he was engaged, to be asked into the office and told of a new contract he was to sign.

"The Guv'nor ain't satisfied with that fourth clause," said Mr. Kemmel. "He says it ain't plain—hey, there, don't let Phelps go, I want him and Klein for witnesses."

"Where isn't it plain?" demanded Adair, who remembered the document as one of unusual rigor, without even the usual two weeks' notice. "Do you wish to add penal servitude to my other fifty-seven penalties?"

Mr. Kemmel did not deign to smile. He was a pale, bald Jew of about thirty-six, with a peculiarly bleak way of addressing actors.

"No," he answered, "we want to clear up the understudy part of it."

"Understudy part of it? What do you mean?"

"Well, if you went on for five or six weeks, taking the Guv'nor's place every night and matinée—you might make out like it was a new engagement—and try to stick us."

Adair was too mystified to take offense.

"Stick you?" he repeated.

"Yes, sue us afterwards for three or four times the salary."—Mr. Kemmel sighed, and looked upward, as though reflecting on man's inhumanity to man. "In this business one has to be so careful," he added, as impersonally as though he were speaking to a stone pillar, "so careful—well, as I was saying, here we have

iron-claded it, and you are to sign where it is penciled, and return the old contract to-morrow.”

The typewritten words swam a little as Adair gazed at them; he was afraid of being tricked; he wanted to make sure that the precious seventy-five a week had not been tampered with. But there it was, all right, along with the new proviso. It was difficult to believe that this last amounted to anything, for O’Dowd’s appearance precluded the least idea of illness. The man was as strong as a bull, with a voice that shook your ear-drums, and the shoulders of a negro coal-heaver. He was offensively healthy, and so limited in any interest but the theater that he moped visibly of a Sunday. One might as well understudy the Metropolitan Museum on the chance of its taking a night off. Adair laughed as he signed the new contract, and hardly thought of the matter for a day or two afterwards.

It was Kimmel who again brought it home to him.

”I’m keeping the orchestra for you to run over the Guv’nor’s songs again with them,” he said. ”You sing them good enough, but the leader says you crowd the overture, and sometimes get ahead of him.”

There are no people in the world so un murmuring as actors; they will rehearse till their voices crack and their legs drop off, and all this, too often, under volleys of insults and reproaches. Adair had played two performances that day, and was worn out and hungry; yet it never occurred to him to make any objection to such an unexpected order. The poor, weary orchestra was there, as hungry and worn out as he, but as willing as every one connected with the stage seems always to be; they scraped and tootled and drummed and bassooned for two mortal hours, from a quarter past eleven till after one A.M., while Adair sang Irish melodies to the darkened house. O’Dowd himself, in a stage-box, was the solitary though far from silent spectator. Cigar in mouth, profane, morose and savagely critical, he bellowed furiously from his dark crimson cave.

”No, no, no, *no!* Hell’s bells, do that again! At the second verse there now! For God’s sake, Mr. Glauber, emphasize the key-note, boom it out on that first cornet so he can’t miss it, and lam it in again on the minor. The minor! *The minor*, damn it! And, oh Lord, Adair, call that a brogue? Hell’s bells, it’s because you’re in such a hurry—Glauber will wait for you—damn it, give it again, let it stick to your teeth—like this: ’Of owl the ma-a-a-a-ids of swate Kilda-a-a-a-rrr-’”

Adair had an unusually tuneful voice, and the middle register of his rather high baritone was full of warmth and charm. These catchy melodies appealed to him, and the sentiment was of a downright, popular kind. One rollicked the humor and quavered the pathos, and either put in brogue or didn’t as one remembered or forgot it. As a matter of fact—except for the brogue—he did the songs more justice than the great O’Dowd himself, and sang them more sweetly and appealingly. He had no conception of it that night, however, as he was hec-

tored and bullied without cessation until his eyes smarted, and his bewildered head was whirling. He had a whipped feeling as he went off, and a corroding sense of defeat and failure. It was idiotic to expect him to sing, and now that he had been tested and found wanting he hoped the silly goats would leave him alone.

He turned as he was putting on his overcoat in the wings, and saw that one of the silly goats had followed him. It was Mr. Kemmel, more bleared and bleak than ever, and evidently with something disagreeable to say.

"Oh, Adair," he exclaimed in a low voice, "hold on a minute, I want to talk to you. I've called a full rehearsal for to-morrow at nine o'clock, orchestra and all—for you'll have to go on in the Guv'nor's place to-morrow night!"

"I go on?—I?" Adair was thunderstruck. "What do you mean, Kemmel?"

"Just that."

"But he's as well as I am."

"The climate ain't agreeing with him, hee, hee!"—Kemmel's cackle was as cold as the draft off an iceberg.

"The climate?"

"New York state. He's got to get right out to-night, and that with us playing a run, and with eight weeks of our lease unexpired. If it weren't for the lease, and my Lord, the forfeit to Boaz and Gotlieb, he'd jump us out with him, run or no run. Ain't it awful, Mabel!"

"But Kemmel, what's the matter?"

"Well, it's like this, Adair. He and Julia Garrett were divorced here two years ago, and the dime museum freaks who tried it allowed her to marry again, and forbade him. They do things like that in New York, and if you kick it's contempt of court! The next day he married our Mrs. O—, Claudia Kirkwood at Chicago. See? There's nothing they can't forget here in two years, and so we came back, feeling pretty safe—and would have been, too, if number one hadn't got tired of the man who was keeping her in London, and rushed over here with her little hatchet. We've been trying to buy it, but it wasn't for sale—at least not at any figure we could pay—so we made a bluff offer of eight thousand, and reserved our Pullman!"

"Are you going to try to keep the run here?"

"*You are!*"

"And if I can't—if I don't draw?"

"Then we'll close."

"I wonder you didn't get Anderson Bailey or Henry Millard, or that man who has just left Blanche Mortimer—what's his name?"

"Costs too much—you're cheap."

Then to take the edge off this remark, he added:

"Say, that's not a knock; we wouldn't take them, anyway; I'm not throwing any bouquets, Adair, but you are damned good in it, really damned good—and are exactly what we want. And don't you feel sore about the money, either. We are paying you seventy-five salary, and four hundred and twenty-five worth of chance to make a big hit. You wish to get on, don't you? Well, you may be a made man in eight weeks. We're taking a gamble, and so must you. What if you are a holy frost? Don't go around belly-aching for money, but see if you can't win out. We believe you can; we are sure you can; go ahead!"

Praise, opportunity, the belief of others in you—how softening they are! Kimmel, the niggardly, the fault-finding, the lean, mean jackal of the Irish lion, suddenly took on a new hue. Adair found himself shaking his hand. What a good chap Kimmel was, after all! He shook his hand cordially, effusively, all former bitterness forgotten in an intoxication of joy. Kimmel melted too, under that irresistible spell; had a spasm of expansiveness and indiscretion; went so far as to say, in a darkling, confidential manner, that Adair had sung "all round" the boss.

"That's why I went for you like I did and balled you up now and then," he confided. "It wouldn't do to have him think *that*, you know. He's funny, like all of them, and while two-thirds of him is box-office, the other third is temperament—and my, it don't do to jar it!"

Phyllis had been sent home alone long before this, and Adair found her sound asleep in bed. A considerate husband would have let her lie undisturbed, and would have kept his great news till the morning. But Adair had no more compunction in waking her up than if she had been a pet puppy; and rolled her over, and tumbled her about almost as roughly, and with the same clenched-teeth zest in her drowsiness, beauty and helplessness. And she, woman-like, loved it, roughness and all—which goes to show how stupid consideration is at times, and how misplaced. Adair never gave it a thought, and his selfishness was rewarded by two bare, satiny arms reaching for his neck, and the eagerest little mouth in the world begging kisses and taking them.

And the news?

Don't blame him if it had grown a little. It was so truly-truly big that there could be no harm in making it a trifle bigger. Is it not permissible, with your adoring little wife nestling beside you in her nightie, and holding you fast lest you might suddenly be snatched away by some envious and ruthless agency—is it not permissible, I say, to add a stick and a cocked hat to some ordinary, very plainly-dressed facts? The whole rehearsal, thus gloriously reviewed in the retrospect, was brought up to the key of Kimmel's appreciation. The unexpired lease of the theater was seen to be a subterfuge, and no doubt O'Dowd had gone away to organize a number two company—the shrewd fellow; he and Kimmel mighty

well knew they had made a "find"—they weren't in that business for nothing—and both were up in the air about it. The next thing would be a two years' contract, with a real salary and percentages! Cyril Adair, the Irish comedian, ha, ha! Well, why not? It would bring him back to Broadway in the right way, the big way! Bring him back to stay, by George, for with this as a stepping-stone they'd never get him off the grand old street again. And once solid—

With unloosened imagination they soared the sky, vying ecstatically with each other in that ethereal azure where everything is possible, two little children before the opening doors of paradise, and hardly less simple and naïve—big hand on little, voice outstripping voice, girl-heart and man-heart blended in an idyllic love. But alas, closer than paradise, oh, so much closer—on the next floor, in fact—was an honest motorman of the Metropolitan Street Railway, who lumbered out of bed, and hammered loudly on the floor for silence. On East Fifty-eighth Street this was a hint not to disturb a sleeping toiler. Bang, bang, bang, and the creaking springs and bedposts as the stalwart Brother of the Ox again sought repose. He got it all right; he often had to hammer, but never had to hammer twice; Phyllis had a great deal of humorous tenderness for her working-men neighbors—those decent, silent men who used to pass her so respectfully on the stairs; who played cheap phonographs on Sunday nights, raised families and canaries, owned dogs and took in boarders, till one wondered their apartments didn't bulge out and burst!—So McCarthy returned to the Land of Nod, and the dormice, reduced to whispers, soon kissed each other sleepily, and took their own road thither.

## CHAPTER XXIII

One wonders sometimes why almost anybody can not be a successful Irish comedian? Given a good figure, a pleasing, sympathetic voice, and a face naturally inclined to smile—and the rest seems as easy as taking pennies from a blind man. Certainly Adair caught his house as surely as ever did O'Dowd, and moved through the piece amid the same thunders of applause. Younger, handsomer, and an incomparably better actor, and with that charm, so baffling to describe, which yet was ever-present and ever-compelling, he measured himself against his predecessor, and never for a moment had the least doubt of the outcome. It is not often that fairy tale came as bravely true; that the dream of overnight turned as quickly into the fact of to-day. Small wonder that Adair, standing there on the

stage when all was done, his ears still ringing with the applause of that departing audience, was too exalted, and much too self-sure to fret at Kemmel's misgivings.

"Oh, you did fine," cried Kemmel. "You were splendid, splendid! But will they ever come back?" He jerked his head in the direction of the curtain.—"It was O'Dowd that brought them—not you; they already had their tickets; the pinch comes to-morrow, day after to-morrow. Can you draw them then, ah, that's the point?—No, no, don't misunderstand me, Adair. I'm all up in the air about you; you justified all we hoped; more than we hoped; you don't need to be told how you hit them to-night. But I'm scared—scared of your success—and I'm that nervous that I—!" Again he turned towards the curtain, and his voice was almost a wail. "Oh, my God, Adair, will they ever come back?"

The astonishing thing was that they did—crowded back, swarmed back, breaking all the records of the piece. Business rose by leaps and bounds till they were playing to capacity; till the thrilling words "sold out" were posted almost nightly on the box-office window; till a ravening horde of speculators took possession of the sidewalk in front, alternately delighting Kemmel with their advertising value, and wringing his soul with anguish at the money he saw going astray. Not that these were his only preoccupations; he was too loyal to his employer's interest, and too expert a theatrical man to let a success run along without a guiding hand. Adair's name went up in electric letters; pictures and paragraphs were scattered broadcast; an option was secured on another theater to continue the run, and, what seemed to him the best of all, he had Adair securely tied up by a new contract. Kemmel, in his own words, was "on to his job," and in his letters to O'Dowd he was already urging a number two company, and submitting estimates and names.

The new contract, of course, was a marvel of one-sidedness; on-to-his-job Kemmel naturally saw to that, and paid a legal iron-worker twenty-five dollars to make it of seamless steel. But on the running out of the existing contract at seventy-five dollars a week, it assured Adair two hundred and fifty as long as it pleased O'Dowd to employ him. Seamless steel could not accomplish everything, and a substantial increase of salary had to be accorded. Adair would have stood out for more; but Phyllis, with feminine caution, prevailed on him, to make no demur. Booful's day would come; stick to her and he would wear diamonds—not to speak of bells on his darling fingers and toes; but just now money was secondary to cementing his position till he was stuck up so high on Broadway that they'd have to feed him with a ladder.—Besides, two hundred and fifty dollars a week was an *awful* lot of money. Forty weeks at two hundred and—

"Forty weeks, you goose!" expostulated Adair. "I'd be the last person to

object if it were forty weeks. But down there, on that smudgy blue place, they can cancel everything in forty seconds.”

”People aren’t cancelled who are playing to capacity.”

”I know, but the utter damned meanness that—”

”Poor little Booful mustn’t worry, and if he’ll stop damning and rampaging, I’ll take him down to his Uncle Macy’s, and show him that lovely fur coat I want him to buy as soon as we have some money.”

”I suppose you are right, Phyllis, but it galls me to—”

”My darling, sweetheart love,” she broke in with pretty seriousness, ”nothing is so important as your success, and once make that secure, money follows as a matter of course. Let Booful keep shinning up the pole, even if they do pick his pockets, and never think of anything but the gilt ball at the top, and—and *me*.”

This was good advice and Booful acted on it. The two hundred and fifty, too, looked less despicable as every day drew it nearer; and as it became, not an abstraction to be argued over and theoretically scorned, but a tidy little bundle of greenbacks that would go far to ease life, both on the spending side of it and the saving. Oh, yes, half of it was to be laid by in the bank for a rainy day. Meanwhile, they lived up to the last cent of the seventy-five, which once so much, now suddenly grew meager by contrast, and by the greater inroads made upon it. Booful rolled home in cabs; there were little restaurant suppers with a fizzling pint of wine; Phyllis bought a coveted peignoir, made out of pale blue fluffynothingness, and with a hand-embroidered collar delicately touched with gold.—Well, why not? The nearing future was too bright not to discount it a little in the present.

We have said that Kimmel kept his press agent busy; and in the same thoroughgoing spirit that placarded every garbage-can from Twenty-sixth Street to Harlem, strove by a thousand means to get Adair’s name prominently into the papers. If he succeeded beyond all expectations he ascribed it to his own astuteness, instead of to the fact that Adair, for the moment, was an extremely spectacular figure in the theatrical world. It was one of the remarkable things about this man that he impressed himself so indelibly in the recollection of every one who had ever known him. It was too often a disagreeable recollection; he had sown hatred with a royal hand; yet, in a queer, negative, altogether unprofitable way he had fascinated everybody. Others might make a disagreeable impression and be forgotten. But no one ever forgot Adair. Magnetism, personality, genius—whatever word one chose to call it—he had the peculiar faculty of arresting attention, of exciting interest, of making people talk and speculate about him.

It was indubitably at times a most unlucky gift. With his reappearance and success the flood-gates of his past were opened, and there gushed forth a Niagara of malignant chatter. His amours, his fights, his disreputable escapades, his

divorce—all were revived. Every one seemed to have a story to his discredit, and to be in haste to get it into print. Nor was his marriage to Phyllis allowed to escape the same soiling publicity, and the tale was embellished with slanders and innuendoes that would have goaded a much more patient man to fury. Adair was with difficulty restrained from knocking editorial teeth down editorial throats; and it showed Phyllis' power over him, and the change generally in his disposition that the police courts were untroubled by his presence.

Lies about herself Phyllis could bear with some fortitude, but Adair's earlier life, as thus revealed by the sensation-mongers, cost her many a bitter pang.—The woman who had tried to shoot him at the Café Martin, and the whole revelation of that horrid affair—the Burt-Wauchope scandal, where rather than save himself by compromising an unknown girl, he had gone to prison for contempt; and that, not quietly and nobly, but with a vain-glorious satisfaction in his martyrdom—the discreditable spree on Tim Bartlett's yacht—how horrible, how unendurable it was—this graveyard resurrection of bygone years!

Adair never justified himself to her, never tried to palliate or explain away the incidents of his outrageous past. That instinct, which in all his relations with her invariably guided him aright, served him as well now as it had always before. He was more gentle, more tender, trusting to kisses rather than words. "Don't let this hurt you," he once said to her, the only time he had ever ventured to speak to her, "that wasn't me, Phyllis. There wasn't any me until you came. You know that, don't you? No me at all, but just a big brute, and if he didn't have a soul it was because it was in your bureau drawer along with your stockings and handkerchiefs, and I guess you thought it was a sachet bag or something, and never looked at it twice."

The most jealous, dismayed and heart-sick of women could not have resisted such pleading; not if she were in love, that is, and her lover's voice was as appealing, and his eyes as convincing and sincere.—In a divine commingling of wife-love and mother-love, so pure, so uplifting that it transcended all physical expression, save alone what the breast could give, she drew his head to her bosom, comforting him, comforting herself in an act emblematic of all that is most beautiful in humanity.

The more one studies the stage the more one is surprised by its disregard of principles that govern every-day, ordinary affairs. Perhaps it is because actors are all children, who have clung tenaciously to playing Indian in the hall, and shooting tigers under the parlor sofa long after the rest of us have grown up. It is a good thing for the world that "temperament" is so largely confined to the paste-board walls of the theater; or we might see our grocer sulking over his

butter, or railway presidents impetuously ordering off trains because they had taken a sudden distaste to the landscape of some state. Self-interest, that sheet anchor of society, is but a keedge to the theatrical ship, and many plow the main without even that. Caprice often outweighs all money-making considerations; and though we are far from decrying those who sacrifice dollars to art (and there are many), may one not be a little peevish with the others, whose vanity and wilfulness often take such spiteful forms?

It certainly cost Shamus O'Dowd all of twelve thousand dollars, if not double or treble that amount to close the run at the Herald Square Theater and bring it to a preemptory conclusion. From his Rocky Mountain ranch he had watched, with a grinding and increasing anger, the success of the man to whom he had left his rôle. The swelling royalty returns exasperated him; the laudatory notices, sent in such profusion by Kemmel (who was innocent enough to think they would please)—were as tongues of flame leaping up the legs of a captive at the stake (such fat legs as they were, and with such an ample scorching surface), and all the talk of another theater and a second company clogged his eyes with blood, and seared his low, coarse face with the furrows of an intolerable indignation.

Nightly for twenty-five years he had been taking others' crimes on his brawny shoulders—murder, arson, embezzlement, forgery—he grabbed for them all, never so happy as when misjudged, with only the audience in the secret of his sacrifice; nobody on the stage could do anything wrong without his making a rush to take the blame—and the oaths he kept with an incredible fidelity; the superb impulses that started from him as freely as perspiration; his goodness, chivalry, and almost insensate honor—! Oh, the irony of reality as contrasted with those affecting fictions!

"Dear Kemmel," he wrote, in his ugly, sprawling, impatient hand. "Take the bloody show right off, and fire Adair, and keep the others on half-salary till you can fix me up a route outside of New York. In God's name, what do you think I'm made of, that I'm to play a number two company all around the clock while he's starring my hit on Broadway? And don't you put up any back-talk about it, either, for I mean every word of it if it takes my last red—though you must see that it don't. If we have to go forfeit on the theater, hell's bells, pay the bloody cormorants, and do you hear, Get Out!!! For I'm sick of the whole business. Fix it up with Mallory to send out something like this, even if you have to pay space rates for it, and I want it featured:—"The substitution of Mr. Cyril Adair for Mr. Shamus O'Dowd in the star-rôle of *A Broth of a Boy* has resulted so disastrously to the management that the Herald Square Theater will be dark on Monday night, and all outstanding tickets refunded at the box-office. The experiment was an unfortunate one for all parties, for Mr. O'Dowd, previous to his departure from New York, owing to his doctor's orders, was playing to enormous business, and

bade fair to remain all the season. In Mr. O'Dowd's hands *A Broth of a Boy* has been a record money-maker, and friends of the genial star will be enthusiastic to learn of his early return to harness. The old adage of the lion's skin is thus verified again, and we are not disparaging Mr. Cyril Adair when we say he was unlucky to be cast for the Donkey.'

"I hope this is all clear, and that I have not overlooked anything. Perhaps when you are about it you had better fire Grace Farquar, too. Pretty girls are cheap, and I should like another more come-on, preferably a blonde this time. Received your check for \$1,182.40. No more for the present. Cordially yours, Shamus O'Dowd."

## CHAPTER XXIV

The right girl's cheek against his own is usually worth more to a man than all the philosophy to be found in books. Adair was stunned; he was too helpless, too hurt even to murmur. When one is struck by a thunderbolt, one lies where one falls. He expected Phyllis to fall also, and in a dull, heart-broken way was surprised by her intrepidity. She picked up the great, despairing creature; kissed him, petted him, crooned over him like a baby, smiling through her tears, and exerting all her pretty fancifulness to make him smile, too. Men may excel in marching up to cannon and saving people from burning buildings, and descending to the bottom of the sea in submarines; but in the forlorn hopes of life it is most often the women who lead.

After a while Adair was revived; on examination it seemed that he wasn't seriously damaged at all, only scared—oh, yes—just scared all out of his poor Booful wits; and a fairy potion called: "What does anything matter as long as we have each other?" was extraordinarily effective in pulling him together again. Then Phyllis jumbled up all the swear-words she had ever heard, and hurled them indiscriminately at Shamus O'Dowd, with such piquancy and humor, coming as they did from that sweet mouth, and with such a delicious lady-intonation that Adair was convulsed, and a tiny bit shocked—which was precisely what she had schemed for, the daring little wretch.

Thus began a new era of looking for an engagement; and it must be said it was a very sad, anxious, bitter era, for they were dreadfully poor—hungry-poor—and every time there was a knock at the door it was a dun who had to

be coaxed and persuaded into going away. Adair's recent prominence had done little to incline managers towards him, and though they were more civil, and he generally got greater consideration at their hands, it was evident that their former hostility still persisted. But his professional reputation now stood pretty high; and occasionally one, bolder than the rest, would coquette with him, keeping him on tenter-hooks while a frantic search was made "for somebody that would do as well." This somebody was always found, and Adair would be told politely that "the vacancy had been filled."

Incidentally he learned that his parting from O'Dowd had been grossly misrepresented by that "genial star," who had spread it about broadcast that Adair was as impossible as ever, and so inflated and top-lofty that it had been cheaper to break the run of the piece than to stand his vagaries any longer. This was in such accord with Adair's former character that it found ready credence up and down Broadway; and the great Mr. Fielman himself enunciated the general sentiment when he said to Rolls Reece, the dramatist: "If that fellow Adair only had the manners and decency of a common hod-carrier, I'd give him a five years' contract, and make a fortune out of him; but the stage is on too high a level nowadays for men like that to get a second chance to disgrace it—at least from me!"

No one appreciates more than an actor the need for being well-dressed when seeking an engagement. His appearance is a considerable part of his capital, both on the boards and off; he may have had little breakfast, and less lunch, but his clothes must be good, and his linen immaculate, and in a "profession" judged so largely by superficialities, it behooves him, poor dog, to affect at any cost an air of fashion that but too often is the most pathetic of masquerades.

It was now that Phyllis rose to the occasion with an unexpected capacity that showed she was, indeed, her father's daughter. She got the janitress to teach her how to wash and iron white shirts; and in a short time could glaze a bosom better than her instructress, and almost as well as a French laundryman. She learned how to press Adair's coats and trousers; she turned his ties; she ironed his collars; she cleaned his gloves with gasolene. No man was ever valeted with more assiduous care, or sent out every morning looking sprucer or better-groomed. When she kissed him good-by for the day it was always with a playful admonition, for Adair bore adversity none too well, and though he tried to hide his despondency he was beginning to break down under the long continued strain.

"And he knows he's a great, big, handsome, splendid Booful?"

"Oh, he's sure of it!"

"And he's going to step out like a Crown Prince going down to see his Emperor-Papa at the club?"

"You bet he is."

"And swing his cane as though he owned all Broadway—and throw back his head like a Greek statue, and swagger into their horrid old offices like a millionaire? For he *is* a millionaire, you know—not a money-one, but a Love-Millionaire—for don't I love him millions and millions?"

It took a kiss to answer that; and then the Love-Millionaire, laughing a little tremulously, would hurry away, whistling with much bravado as he went down the stairs, two at a time, as suited a great, big, handsome, splendid Booful; who, whatever his demerits in the past, was fast retrieving himself before the Great Judge.—And if, on his departure, Phyllis would lay her head on her arm and give way to uncontrollable tears, you would be wrong to feel too sorry for her. For the misfortune that draws a man and woman together, and extorts from each their noblest qualities is not really a misfortune at all, but a precious and beautiful thing that it would become us more to envy.

Thus the days passed in a deadening, cowering, unutterably depressing search for work. Adair was rebuffed, put off, told to call again; he abased himself to men he despised; he forced his presence with hungry persistence on dramatists and stars who were putting on new plays, affecting a good fellowship that was a transparent, dismal lie. He tried to buy them wine, cigars—inveigle them into promises, and his lunch often went in a tip to some greedy understrapper who guarded their portals.

It is strange the mile-wide demarcation that divides the real stage—the stage of Sothern, John Drew, Faversham, Maude Adams, etc., from that other to which Adair had so long associated himself. This other had no representative save Adair in the whole Thespian Club. It was a region apart, and a region that Adair was determined never to return to. It would have called him back willingly enough, and in his desperation he might have returned to it had it not been for Phyllis. It was she who kept his resolution alive; she was too confident of his talent to let him throw it back into that Dead Sea; it meant the abandonment of every serious ambition;—artistically speaking, suicide, death.—Booful belonged to the top, and it was his business and hers to get him there.

Brave words, but how about fulfilment? The end of the month would find them turned out of doors. Phyllis dreaded to see herself in the glass, she was becoming so pale and wan; in the unequal battle everything was going except her courage; sometimes, alone in the silent apartment, even that seemed to droop, and a daunting terror would overwhelm her—less for herself than for Adair. He was drinking again, and justified himself with a bitter vehemence. "They all

say, 'Have a drink'!" he exclaimed. "Nobody ever says 'Have an eat'!"—His harsh, despairing humor recurred to her, as well as his sudden resentment at her pity. He had made atonement, but the sting remained—or rather a foreboding of something somber and evil that in spite of herself she could not shake off.

One day at the club a card was brought Adair, inscribed Mr. John H. Campbell; and the boy told him the gentleman was waiting to see him in the visitors' room. Adair knew no such person, but he went out to greet him with mingled curiosity and hope, for here perhaps was the long-sought engagement. An imposing, distinguished looking, very well-dressed man of fifty rose from the sofa, and asked him, with much suavity, whether he had the pleasure of addressing Mr. Cyril Adair. This question being quickly and politely settled, the imposing gentleman begged for a few words of conversation; and indicating a place for Adair beside him, he reseated himself with a bland, kind air which yet was not without an underlying seriousness, not to say solemnity.

"I have come on a very confidential matter," he said, fixing Adair with his shrewd, keen, heavy-lidded eyes. "A matter, Mr. Adair, so delicate that it is not easy to convey it except in a round-about form. May I explain I have sought you out at the request of—Mr. Ladd?"

There was a pause; the shrewd, heavy-lidded eyes slowly inventoried Adair and read beneath the tarnished air of fashion. Failure, need, hunger sap a man, and can not be hid, least of all from a professional observer. John Hampden Campbell was one of the leaders of the New York bar and was what they call a "court room lawyer" of high rank; which means that others hand up the guns, while he shoots them off. His knowledge of human nature was profound, and being profound was neither unsympathetic nor unkind. But he could shoot straight, nevertheless, and it was hardly a satisfaction to the victim to hear that murmur of "poor devil!" as the eminent counsel laid aside the smoking weapon.

"My father-in-law!" exclaimed Adair in amazement.

"He would be happier if he could cease to bear that name," said Mr. Campbell.

"He can hardly very well help himself," retorted Adair bluntly.

"No, but you could," put in the lawyer, with a vagueness that was intentional. "By this time you must realize that it is a union that is scarcely to your own best interests nor the young lady's."

"Haven't noticed it," said Adair, staring at him queerly.

"Mr. Ladd would be prepared to make very heavy sacrifices to put back things as they were before."

"What sort of sacrifices?"—Adair's tone was not unfriendly; it was rather

questioning and perplexed.

"We would rather leave it to you to suggest them, though we are counting more on your concern for her welfare. Frankly, Mr. Adair, without meaning the least disrespect, and with a thorough knowledge of your honorable and straight-forward conduct—do you consider you're acting rightly in holding this young lady to what most people would call a very bad bargain?"

"Being married to a starving actor?"

"Oh, that is putting it too—too—"

"Of course, she has thrown herself away—I know that."

There was a gleam in the heavy-lidded eyes.

"It could all be rectified," said Mr. Campbell soothingly. "Very easily, and very quickly rectified. It is just a question, it seems to me, of our getting together, and talking it over reasonably. In fact, some of the details might be omitted entirely. Mr. Ladd is a man of very large means, and is the soul of honor. He would see to it that your future was made easy."

"How easy?" asked Adair.

"I mean," returned Mr. Campbell, "that he would substantially recognize your honest desire to be guided by his wishes—wishes that you admit are just, and so much to the young lady's advantage that you are willing to withdraw entirely."

"Those are all words," exclaimed Adair; "let's get to figures."

Mr. Campbell looked pained. After having confined the interview so skillfully within the limits of irreproachable good taste, this brutality outraged his ear. He had not been unprepossessed by Adair, and felt sorry for him.—But here was the cloven hoof.—The fellow was just a low, mercenary adventurer after all.

"The figures are ten thousand dollars," he answered coldly.

"Why, I don't call that anything!"

"Cash," added Campbell, with a pursing of his lips.

"Of course, it's cash," cried Adair, "it's going to be that, whatever it is. Only it isn't enough. She's worth more than ten thousand dollars."

Campbell saw that his personal bias had made him err. Adair's vibrating tone had caught the note of his own; suavity and good humor were all-important, and he scurried back to them, like an incautious general flying for the batteries he has left behind. When he spoke again it was in his best lullaby manner.

"My dear fellow," he said, "the real point is that you concede the principle. That is so, is it not?"

"Hell, yes," returned Adair. "I'd concede a lot for fifty thousand dollars."

"But that is a very, very large sum of money."

Adair, with one hand in his trousers pocket, was restlessly turning over the two nickels that were there—all he had.

"I don't think so," he said. "Anyway, she's worth that, and more."

"I was hardly authorized to commit Mr. Ladd to such an amount," objected Mr. Campbell, "though I will not say right off that I might not entertain it. But you understand, Mr. Adair, that it implies you will not resist an action for divorce, and— Well, you know we'd like to have the matter absolutely settled and done with."

"For fifty thousand dollars?"

The heavy-lidded eyes were obscured by a momentary glaze.

"We will meet you," said Mr. Campbell.

Adair rubbed the nickels together, and asked, with a slight catch of his breath, if he could have something on account.

"Certainly," assented the lawyer, producing his pocket-book. He removed a sheaf of bills, and Adair perceived that they were in denominations of a thousand dollars each. He had never seen a thousand-dollar bill before in his whole life, and here was a thick packet of twenty or more. No wonder that he was overawed. Campbell noticed his fascinated stare, and dilly-dallying with the notes, spread them out with an elaborate carelessness. To Adair, it was all a blur of \$1,000, \$1,000, \$1,000, \$1,000, a green mist of money, a crisp, crinkling, dizzying affluence.—Campbell was saying something to him. There was a paper to be signed. It was a temporary memorandum to be replaced later by a more formal document. Buzz, buzz, buzz! The paper was handed to him. Buzz, buzz, buzz, and the room going round and round. He was standing on his feet, shaking with the pent-up passion that he had been so long holding back. The actor in him had been waiting for that, but the actor was lost in the man.

"You're a damned hound!" he cried hoarsely, "And the man who sent you is a damned hound, and here is your damned paper, and may it choke you both! My wife isn't for sale, do you hear that! My wife isn't for sale, whether it's for fifty thousand or fifty million! Is that plain? Do you concede the principle, or shall I boot it into you? I thought I'd lead you on; I thought I'd just see how far you'd go—you with your sable overcoat, and fat pocket-book, and your stinking respectability. I had you sized up all right, and was only giving you rope to hang yourself. Get out of here, and get out quick, or I'll kick you from here to your cab. Get out!"

It was needless to say that John Hampden Campbell did not need to be pressed. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace could have scarcely been in a bigger hurry. Cramming the notes and papers in his pockets, he sped from the visitors' room like a large, imposing projectile which had been fired from some monster cannon. A second later his flying coat-tails were deposited in his cab, and he was speeding away, considerably shaken in spirit and body, for the mountain quiet of his twenty-eight story office.

Lying on Phyllis' table, all ready for mailing, was a long letter to her father. Pride had crumbled and she had determined to seek his help. She had begun it with constraint, attempting, none too effectually, to conceal her sense of injury and injustice; but as page followed page the old tenderness returned with an irresistible force. That gray, handsome head was before her, that mellow voice was in her ears, and the wretchedness and folly of alienation came home to her with a new and piercing significance. The request for money; the cold, exact exposition of her need—was passed and forgotten in the impetuous rush of her pen. She loved her husband, she loved her father, and this estrangement was unbearable. Like many women under the stress of a deep emotion she wrote with a singular eloquence. She wept as she described Cyril—his unceasing goodness, his loyalty, his fortitude, his good humor and devotion. He was everything a woman loved best in a man; and instead of her marriage having been a mistake, a failure, it was more than she thought life could ever give her. Would not her father forget all that had passed, as she, too, would forget? Their love was too deep, too dear, to make reconciliation impossible. She would climb into his lap again, and put her arms about him—his sad, worn, desolate little girl—and they would whisper to each other what fools they had been, and kiss away the last shadow of misunderstanding.

So it ran, page after page, in her fine, delicate hand, an appeal that no father could have resisted. A beautiful letter, touched with the quality of tears; full of womanly longing; heart crying to heart, across an aching void. Alas, that it never went. It was torn to pieces, and thrown passionately on the floor. Campbell had intervened, and the news of his offer was thus received in the little flat on East Fifty-eighth Street. "That's the end of it," cried Phyllis, regarding the scraps of paper. "That's the end of everything between Papa and me!"

## CHAPTER XXV

It is one of the peculiarities of looking for a theatrical engagement that hope is never quite extinguished. There is always some one who wants you to call next week; there is always a company just short of a part they are considering you for; there is always some friendly member of the Thespians who has "mentioned your name," and gives you a scribbled address or a telephone number. This is stated to explain the fact why Adair, instead of surrendering to circumstances, as

any other man would have done in any other walk of life, still snatched at straw after straw with egregious determination. His circumstances were becoming absolutely desperate. Suspension from the club was staring him in the face; in eight days his sticks of furniture and his trunks would be dumped out on the street; it was only by the most rigid parsimony that body and soul could be kept together. Phyllis said the dormice were floating on a shingle, and with tearful laughter would expatiate on the pitiful, half-drowned things, so scared and hungry on a bobbing sea. What was to happen when they slid off?—Oh, but Booful wasn't to mind. She'd hold his poor, pretty, dormouse head up, and swim him off to a lovely island where there were peanuts on peanuts, and an alabaster mousery with all modern improvements.

That lovely island seemed a terribly long way off. As the emblem of an engagement it lay so far over the horizon that Adair began to doubt its very existence. His eyes grew lack-luster; he lost his confident bearing; poverty and failure stamped him, as they stamp every man with an unmistakable mark. We instinctively move away from the unsuccessful. We see that mark, and widen our distance. Success likes success. It isn't decent to be very, very poor. Fingers tighten on pocketbooks, and respectable, prosperous legs quicken their steps.—Adair was sinking, though the dismal masquerade still went on—the immaculate cuffs, the once smart tie, the pressed clothes, shiny with constant ironing. There is many such a figure on Broadway—and in some mean room there is usually a woman who believes in him, stinting herself and starving for his sake.

One dark, wintry Sunday afternoon in early spring, as Phyllis was sitting near the frosted window, sewing and thinking and dreaming by the scanty light, she was roused by the tramp of many footsteps on the stair outside, and a confused bumping, scuffling sound, accompanied by a hoarse murmur of voices. With a horrible premonition she ran to the door and opened it, giving a cry as she recognized Adair being supported in by two companions. His face was swollen and discolored; one eye was closed in a rim of crimson; his mouth was dribbling blood; sawdust and filth befouled his clothes, and a stench of vile whisky exhaled from him like a nauseating steam. He was helped over to a sofa, and allowed to collapse, while the men hurried away as though ashamed of their task, and thankful to have done with it.

It was the first time he had ever appeared repugnant to Phyllis; he was drunk, and she knew it, and the fumes of the disgusting stuff stifled her with loathing. But she unloosened his collar, laid a couple of pillows under his head, unlaced his shoes; and bringing a basin, rinsed the oozing blood from his lip. With pity, yes, but with the raging, furious pity that goes with lost illusions, and the falling of one's little world; a pity less for him than for herself that this should be the end of a love that to her had been the very breath of life.

He regarded her stupidly with his one open eye, moaning faintly, and drawing himself laboriously near the basin, spat into it. Then he put out his hand, and tried to touch her, but she shrank from him.

"Phyllis," he said, in a raucous whisper, "Phyllis"; and then, as though overcome by the exertion, closed that single bleary eye, and dozed off. But it was not for very long. He awakened again. "They loaded me up with that cursed whisky," he whispered. "I was all in, and needed it. God, if they didn't pour a bottle of it down my throat!"—For a while he rambled on brokenly, spluttering with laughter as he held up his clenched fist as though he found a strange, childish entertainment in the action.—Little by little he pulled himself together. He was a powerful man, sound to the core, and though he was badly spent, health and nature were rallying to his side.

"Come here," he said, in the same husky whisper, but with a noticeable increase of vigor and self-command. "Come here, I wantter tellyerboutit."

Phyllis crouched by his side, so dejected and heartsick that it was well for him she hid her face.

"I was with Morty Stokes and a whole lot of them," he went on, his words running together tipsily. "Tagging on, too, you know—royal, open-handed fellow, Morty, good fren' of mine, always something to eat—gives bell-boy tip that would keep us for a week. And it was down at the Queensbury Club, pay ten dollars, and, member—one-day member, you know—though the fight we went to see was tipped off—wasn't any, you know—but we stayed on, Morty opening champagne, and Kid Kelly was there who beat Cyclone Crandall last month; and somehow Morty and the Kid got into a row about Tammany corruption, and both so blind that neither of them could have spelled Tammany for a million, and everybody had to pull them apart. Then Morty, just blazing said: 'I can't lick you, but here's a fellow that can,' and he pointed at me, and says, 'Cyril, I'll give you five hundred dollars to wipe this dirty loafer off the map!' And I took it as a joke, and said yes I would, and before I knew it they were appointing a referee, and Kid Kelly was stripping down to the skin."

Adair stopped and laughed—a groaning kind of laugh, as mirthless as the wind that rattled the window-panes. "He had only been out of training ten days, and as for my standing up against him he might have been Battling Nelson. But it suddenly came into my head, why here's a chance to make something—not Morty's five hundred dollars for licking him—I'd only drunk half a glass of wine, and knew better—but a bit at the other end of it; and so I said, yes, four hundred for the winner, and a hundred for the man out, and all as insultingly as I could make it, as though that hundred was for the Kid instead of me. And finally, when it was all settled, it all wasn't—Morty standing out for two ounce gloves, and the others for sixes, he saying he wanted to mark the dirty mutt with something to

stay; and that it was to be two ounces or nothing, though what was to happen to me in the mix-up wasn't mentioned, the fact being he didn't care as long as he could see the Kid pounded; and it was two shakes the Kid didn't pound *him*, it all worked up to such a hullabaloo, with some of them holding him, and others the Kid, and all of them yelling at once till at last they shoved us into the ring, with Tom Hallahan for referee, and Billy Sands holding the stakes and keeping time, and then we shook hands and squared off.

"The Kid wasn't so soused but what he had an inkling of the truth, and at the first go-off he meant to let me down easy, like the good-hearted Irish boy he was, and I could see it in his eye—(half of fighting is in the eyes, Phyllis)—and it was just a pat here, and a wallop there, and a lot of quick-stepping and stage-play, all feints and parries and pretending. But I wasn't for selling the fight, thinking Morty might sour on it, and call the whole thing off—so I walked right into the Kid, hammer and tongs; and by the time I had barked my knuckles on his teeth, and landed him a lefter on the jaw for all I was worth, he was as savage as hell, and ready to kill me; and by George, it was only bull-headed luck that he didn't—that, and the wine he had drunk, and I stood up to him for five rounds; and first it was for the hundred dollars, and then for my very life. I managed to get on my legs before I was counted out on the fifth, though the floor was heaving like a ship at sea, and I saw about eight of him, shooting out sixteen arms, and eighty-four fists; and down I went for keeps.—But I got it!"

He opened his hand, and showed two fifty dollar bills.

"They won't put us out on the street for yet a while," he said gloatingly. "We're a hundred dollars ahead, not to speak of about nine quarts of whisky! Take it, sweetheart, and, and—"

Her arms were about him, and she was sobbing, her lips seeking his, unmindful of the blood, the swollen, discolored flesh, the stale reek of whisky, every fiber in her agonizing with tenderness and remorse. Those things that but a minute before had filled her with an unutterable revulsion, that had shocked and dismayed her beyond expression were of a sudden transformed into the evidences of a tragic devotion. It was for her that he came to be lying there, disheveled, bleeding and dirty; covered with livid bruises; smashed, disfigured, and cruelest of all—misjudged. No wonder that the scorching tears fell; that the girlish arms could not hold him tight enough; that the little head snuggled down so pitifully, so guiltily, to atone for the cruel wrong.

"I guess the dormice are still on their shingle," said Adair, "though a lot of skin and fur has been rubbed off one of them. Make him a cup of tea, dearest—his

little nose is hot, and I'm sure it would do him good!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

It was a week before Adair ventured to go out except at night, and it was longer still before he outgrew the stiffness following the lost battle. He congratulated himself on having come so well out of it, for an ordinary man, however good an amateur boxer, runs a serious chance of harm in a fight with a champion pugilist. The doctor passed his ribs, passed his jaw, deliberated over his collar-bone, and finally reduced the damages to a pair of broken knuckle-bones and a badly-sprained wrist. Privately he warned Phyllis that her husband had had a narrow escape, and told her to keep him out of mischief for the future. "He's the worst-mauled man I have examined for a long while," he said, "and that blow over the heart might have killed him. Next time let him agree with his adversary quickly according to the Gospel—or use a club, and use it first."

But the knuckles and the wrist were not all the damage. With lessened strength there was lessened will, lessened courage; and acquiescence in defeat succeeded the long spun-out endeavor to turn the tide of fortune. Soon it was tacitly understood between them that they could strive no longer; and when Adair, with something of a catch in his voice, said he would go round and see Heney, Phyllis made no demur. Heney represented that other stage of nonentities and fourth-raters; that maelstrom of hopelessness, cheapness and shoddy; that vast theatrical system which cadges for the public's small change, and seeks to please the factory-girl and the artisan. To go back to it was to abandon everything—ambition, reputation, future.

Yet it was pleasant to be warmly received. Heney was overjoyed, gave him a good cigar, patted him on the knee, and said he was just the chap he had been looking for to take out *The Danites*. He had been working over the piece himself to introduce Portolini's trained dogs, and incidentally to "jack it up." Heney was common and underbred and talked with a toothpick in his mouth—but he was a man not without a certain feeling. He made no allusions that might embarrass Adair, and ignored recent events. His consideration was increased perhaps by the opportunity thus given him of getting Adair for *The Danites*. He had been hoping to revivify it with the trained dogs, but here was a man who could command success, for Adair was a money-maker and the surest "draw" in the business.

Terms were quickly settled. A hundred a week, and a forty weeks' contract, with the usual notice on both sides. It could be typed and signed later on; meanwhile here was a spare carbon of the play to look over; and rehearsals would begin as soon as the dogs had finished their vaudeville dates at One Hundred Twenty-fifth Street and Brooklyn.

Adair left the office feeling as though he had sold himself to the devil. An old nickname of his recurred to him as he walked slowly homeward: "The Four-bit Mansfield." He kept repeating it on the way, "The Four-bit Mansfield, The Four-bit Mansfield!" Yes, that was what he was; that was as near as he would ever get to the real thing; before he hadn't cared, but now it was gall and wormwood to him. Yet it was as "The Four-bit Mansfield" that he had won Phyllis. It would not do to forget that. Winning Phyllis had been the most wonderful event in his life, little though he had appreciated it at the time. Looking back at it all he was astounded at his own blindness; astounded and frightened, too, to recall how easily the affair might have had a different ending. Love was a queer business; he hadn't really cared very much for her at first; he had simply taken her because she was so bewitchingly pretty—and with such innocence had offered herself; and yet, bit by bit, it had grown to this, grown into something that was the only thing in life. He could readily conceive himself dying for Phyllis if it meant saving her or protecting her, and that with no tom-fool fuss either, or theatrics.

A fellow couldn't hope to carry away all the prizes, and he'd rather be a "Four-bit Mansfield" with Phyllis than the biggest kind of a star without her. What a gay, gentle, insinuating, clever little wretch she was! He could come home in the damndest humor—it hurt him to think how often he had—so cranky and impatient and cross that any other woman in the world would have flounced into a fury—and little by little she would coax him and pet him and smooth him down till instead of flinging plates at each other, as most people would have done, by George, she'd be sitting on his knee, and he'd be smiling down at her, a thousand times more in love than ever, with such a pang of self-reproach, and such a new understanding of her sweetness and tenderness that his heart would swell till he could hardly speak.

When Adair left his house that afternoon to call on Heney, he noticed a large, luxurious limousine snailing along Fifty-eighth Street as though the chauffeur was searching for a number; and he wondered what so fine a car could be doing in such a mean neighborhood. Had he seen it stop in front of his own door he would have been more surprised still, for that was what it did, to the extreme gratification of the youngsters playing about the sidewalk. A gentleman alighted, rang the bell marked "Adair," pushed open the door when it began to emit mys-

terious clicks of welcome, and toiled up those interminable stairs till he found Phyllis awaiting him at the entrance of her little apartment.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I'm looking for Mr. Adair?"

Phyllis saw before her a thin, dark, exceedingly well-dressed man of about forty, with an aquiline nose, a pale handsome face, and an air of noticeable distinction and importance.

"I'm sorry, but he has just gone out," she answered. "I am Mrs. Adair—will you not come in?"

He followed her into the sitting-room with a manner of such ease and good-breeding that Phyllis was suddenly transported back to her former existence, and tingled with a pleasurable curiosity.

"Perhaps I can do instead," she said, smiling, and offering the stranger a chair.

"Not only as well—but better," he returned. "If I had not heard about you I should not be here at all." He kept staring at her in a keen, questioning way with something of the penetration, and the appearance of inner mental working of some great specialist studying a patient. Though continuing to look at her, Phyllis could feel that those brilliant eyes had left nothing in the room unnoticed, and she realized with a twinge how pinched and shabby it all must seem to him.

"I am Rolls Reece, the dramatist," he observed at last. "It may be that you've never heard of me, though I hope you have—for it will facilitate matters."

Of course that name was familiar to Phyllis. Rolls Reece was the author of more successful plays than any man in America. He was the founder of a school—his own school—and to take a foreign word for which we have, no equivalent he was essentially a *féministe*. In representing nice women on the stage, women of refinement and position, he had a field in which he stood paramount. Not that he confined himself wholly to plays of this type, however. He was an indefatigable worker; with an ambition that balked at nothing; he was always reaching out, always trying experiments; a piece of his, *Money, the King*, had been strength and brutality personified.—That it was Rolls Reece who was before her filled Phyllis with a sudden and gratified astonishment.

"Certainly I know your name," she said. "Who is there that doesn't!"

He waved the compliment from him with a gesture of his hand—a hand as fine and small as a woman's. One invariably associated Rolls Reece with those fine, small hands, which, when he grew excited, gripped themselves on his chair with the tenacity of a sailor's in the rigging of a ship. It showed the importance he attached to this interview that he was already beginning to clench the furniture.

"My dear lady," he went on, "I have to be frank with you—and being frank, especially in regard to an absent husband, is neither easy nor agreeable. Perhaps I had better give you the sugar on the pill first; and that is I have outlined a play

that I should like to write with the idea of Mr. Adair creating the central figure. If I could write it with him in mind, I am presumptuous enough to think I could make a big thing of it.—He could do it, of course—do it magnificently. This talk does not turn on his talent, his ability, which is immense. No, no, these are not compliments. Years ago when I was a nobody on the *Advertiser*, doing theatrical criticism with a recklessness and off-handedness that now makes my gooseflesh quiver to look back on—just a know-it-all young ass—I remember the profound impression Mr. Adair’s work used to make upon me. I have often seen him since, going out of my way to do so—one has had to, you know—and that original conviction of his power has steadily grown with me.”

He stopped, giving her that curious look of his, so grave, and yet with what might be called a smile in suspension.

It swiftly lit up his face as Phyllis remarked: “Now for the pill?”

“Yes, the pill,” faltered Rolls Reece, gripping the arms of his chair, and appearing acutely uncomfortable. “Ahem, the pill is—I suppose it isn’t grammatical to say are—well, in fact, some of Mr. Adair’s characteristics that those who admire him most, must deprecate and deplore—characteristics that have unhappily hampered, or rather so far have ruined his career. Please, please, Mrs. Adair, do not stop me! This is not a question of personalities at all. Regard me simply as a contractor, looking for a first-class workman—Bill, we’ll call him; and it having reached me in a round-about way that Bill has married and pulled up, I’ve dropped in on Mrs. Bill to make sure.”

“Are you not afraid Mrs. Bill may be prejudiced in her husband’s favor?”

“My dear lady, it is remarkable to find any one prejudiced in Bill’s favor! That it should be his wife is all the better.”

“Better for what?”

“I’ve told you I want to write that play for him.”

At this Phyllis’ rising ill-will died away. There was too much of the little Frenchwoman in her for her not to become diplomatic and cool when her husband’s interests were at stake. Instead of making a hot rejoinder, she replied, with a frankness not at all easy under the circumstances: “I understand perfectly what you mean, Mr. Reece. It is true he has spoiled everything, and has an awful lot to live down. I ought to be grateful to you as the first person—the first important person—who has realized that he has changed. But how am I to convince you of it?”

“By speaking just as you do.”

“Oh, I can hardly hope that a wife’s word will count for much. Yet, Mr. Reece, it is absolutely true.”

“It is not his past that bothers me,” went on Rolls Reece. “Everybody has a past, and I was a theatrical critic once myself—but what I want to be assured of is

that he won't begin a new one. Really, Mrs. Adair, if I put him in a big Broadway production can I be guaranteed that he will-behave?"

"Yes."

"And neither drink, nor quarrel with anybody, nor punch anybody's head-(including mine)-or calmly leave us in the lurch because he doesn't like the pattern, say, of the dressing-room carpet?"

"Wait and talk with him yourself.-All that folly is over and done with."

"The longer I live," observed Rolls Reece, "the more I appreciate that women are the power behind the throne. Every man, in a queer, subtle sort of way, reflects some woman. I came here to see whom Adair was reflecting, and if I hadn't been satisfied I shouldn't have stayed. My interest is selfish, of course. My unwritten play to me is much more important than Mr. Adair; otherwise-to me, I mean-his peculiarities of character would be of supreme unimportance.-May I say he reflects an unusually charming and delightful one?"

Phyllis smiled.

"I hope that means it is all settled?" she asked.

"If you'll go bond for him-yes."

She clapped her hands. "Oh, I'm so glad," she cried. "Oh, Mr. Reece, I can not tell you how poor we are, how desperate. It has been such a heart-breaking struggle, and we had almost reached the giving-up place.-But tell me, you say the play is not written yet?"

"Oh, no, we're talking of an October opening."

October! They were then in early April. The joy, the elation died under that crushing blow. What was to become of them during the intervening months? Phyllis could scarcely speak, the disappointment was so keen. "It will be very hard for us to wait," she said at last. "Mr. Adair has to go back to the cheap theaters, and from what he said I am afraid he will have to sign a long contract."

Under any other circumstances Rolls Reece would have laughed. Adair, that disreputable genius, as a scrupulous respecter of contracts, foregoing the star part in a New York production at the dictates of honor and conscience was sublimely incredible. But nevertheless Phyllis' own sincerity impressed him. Her beauty was of a fine, sensitive, aristocratic type, the kind that the dramatist, of all men, would recognize and appreciate the most. The proud yet touching air, the exquisite girlishness, the arch, appealing, pretty manners-all disturbed him with a feeling that verged on jealousy. No doubt Adair had altered. To be believed in by such a woman surely counted for something; to be put on a pedestal by her was to stay there, of course; it was impossible to conceive anything low or underhanded being confided to one who struck him as the embodiment of candor. The surprise was how Adair had ever got her.

"I have thought of all that," he said, referring to her last remark. "If Mr.

Adair will be satisfied with modest rôles, and will consent to go on the road, I can contrive to keep him busy the whole summer." In the mouth of any other man, what he added would have sounded intolerably conceited; but he had been successful too long, and had grown too used to it, for the sentence to be anything but matter-of-fact. "I have eight companies out, you know, and whether my managers like it or not, they'll have to find room for your husband."

His tone was so considerate, so kind, and his eyes gave such a sense of dawning friendship that Phyllis' reserve melted. She spoke eagerly, with a little tremor of emotion, and a delicious consciousness of sympathy and responsiveness. "I want to tell you about him," she said. "I couldn't do it before when it seemed in doubt whether you'd risk your play with him or not. It would have seemed, oh, as though I were trying to plead with you, and debasing myself and him to win you over. But now that it is settled I am not ashamed—no, Mr. Reece, I am proud to make you realize how you have misjudged him."

With this as a beginning she told him of their coming to New York; of their struggles and privations; of Adair's unshaken, unwavering devotion during those bitter days. With poverty love had not flown out of the window; no, it had drawn them closer together than ever before. She might never have known otherwise the depth of the noblest and tenderest heart that ever beat; he had never complained, never railed—had borne himself throughout with a sort of silent fortitude, and oh, all this with such an effort to be cheerful, to make light of things that were grinding them to pieces. She told him of her father's offer, of Adair's passionate rejection of it at a moment when he was next to starving; of the fight with Kid Kelly, and the hundred dollars he had earned at such a cost. Through her mist of tears she saw that Rolls Reece was not unmoved; his eyes, too, were moist; once he took her hand, and pressed it to his lips, with something about their being friends—always friends. Throughout he had perceived the other side of the story, the side she had not dwelt on, and indeed was scarcely aware of—her own intrepid part in that comradeship, her own sustaining courage and love. The picture she drew of Adair conjured up for the dramatist another even more touching; and old bachelor that he was, and pessimist of pessimists on the marriage question he momentarily turned traitor to all his convictions.

When she stopped, with a sudden shame at having unbosomed herself to a stranger, and in a confusion that was all the prettier for the blush that accompanied it, and the air at once so deprecating and scared as though she were disgraced for ever—Rolls Reece hastened to save her from the ensuing embarrassment.

"You mustn't regret having taken me into your confidence," he said. "I'm just an old sentimentalist, and belong more than anybody to that world that loves a lover. It is worth all those stairs to hear anything so really affecting and beautiful, and when I said I wanted to be friends, I meant it."

"I'm afraid you're almost as impulsive as I am, and as indiscreet."

"Oh, my dear lady, if it wasn't for indiscretion what a dreary planet this would be to live in.—Imagine the heartrending effect if everybody thought before they spoke, and men were all wise, and women were all prudent! Why, what would happen to dramatists?"

"You are nice," she said, giving him a candid, smiling look in which there was a lurking roguishness; "and I'm glad we're going to be friends; and I'm not a bit sorry I gave you a peep into an awfully hidden place—a girl's heart, you know—though, of course, you mustn't expect to make a habit of it; and I'm glad you're the great, famous, splendid Rolls Reece, and are going to like me, and write Cyril a wonderful play, and be our fairy uncle for ever and ever; and some day, when you are accused of plagiarism or something, and they put you in jail, I'll come down to the prison and bring you a loaf of bread with a file in it, or change clothes with you in your cell, and then it will come home to you how very lucky you were ever to know me, and you will skip off to South America bursting with gratitude."

"In the meanwhile I'm afraid the fairy uncle had better bring his call to an end," remarked Rolls Reece. "It's less spectacular—though I can still be grateful, mayn't I? Indeed, I am so happy, Mrs. Adair, for you have convinced me in more ways than you are aware of that we have been unjust to your husband, and that I may safely trust the play to him."

"I can't help doubting whether you'll ever come back?" she said, as they stood confronting each other. "It's a dream, and you are a dream-dramatist, and I'll wake up from a nap, and will find everything more miserable than before because of it.—Some day you will know what this means to us," she added poignantly. "Some day when—when it's long, long passed, and we can talk about it like ordinary people.—You have to get a little way off to be sorry for yourself, don't you? I am just beginning to see how unspeakably wretched and forlorn we were, that poor boy and I, though I should probably have never found it out if it hadn't been for you."

"Well, that's over," said Rolls Reece comfortingly. "If he'll work hard, and do his best, I'll back Mr. Adair through thick and thin. He has an unquestionable talent; it will be a pleasure, an inspiration to write for him; if he'll do his share, I'll engage to do mine, and between us we'll keep at it, play on play, till we land a winner. Only—" and here he paused, and raised a warning finger.

"He'll be as good as gold," said Phyllis, filling in the interval. "Don't let the fairy uncle worry about that."

"And when may I see him?"

An appointment was forthwith made for the same evening; and the dramatist shook hands, and was about to go when Phyllis exclaimed again that it was

a dream, and that it simply couldn't, couldn't, couldn't be true, and asked him laughingly to leave his umbrella as something tangible to show Adair. Rolls Reece caught at the notion, but instead of anything as prosaic as an umbrella, slipped off a superb ruby ring instead, and laid it on the table.

"There's the pledge of the fairy uncle's return," he said gaily, and hurried away before it could be restored to him.

"Good Heavens, Phyllis," cried Adair, "what's that thing?"

"A ring."

"But it's a ruby—why, it's valuable—where on earth did it come from?"

"A fairy uncle left it."

"Left it?"—Adair stared at her astounded.

"Yes, I was afraid he wouldn't keep his promise to come back, so he said I could hold it by way of a pledge."

"But who is He?"

"Rolls Reece, I think his name is."

In an instant he was by her side, clutching at her arm.

"Phyllis—my God—it wasn't really Rolls Reece?"

"Yes, Booful-love-darling, it just was, and I've adopted him as our fairy uncle, and he has adopted us, and he's coming back at nine this evening to talk things over, and he wants to star you in a new play of his, and listen, listen, Cyril, he believes in you, and says you have an immense talent, and says he is going to write you play after play, and, oh, my darling, my darling, my darling—!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

Rolls Reece returned and redeemed his ring, and attested his sincerity in manifold and delightful ways. He did not mince matters with Adair, however, and put it to him straight, in a man-to-man talk that lasted but twenty minutes yet in which everything was said, accepted, and agreed on. The actor, dosed alternately with home-truths and praise, emerged triumphantly from the ordeal.

He was told he had missed a magnificent career; that it was only his own unmitigated folly he had to thank for it; that the number of successful dramatists who were willing to write plays for him was reduced to precisely one—and that

one was none too sure of his, Adair's, reformation—though as confident as ever, more than ever, of his genius. That word, like charity, covered a multitude of sins, if Rolls Reece could say that nothing else mattered. Adair, in fact, let the whole case against him go by default.

"I'm changed," he said simply. "That's all behind me, Reece. The reason for it is in the other room there—and I should think the sight of her is worth all the denials and protestations I could make."

"Yes, indeed, it is, Adair," said Rolls Reece.

"I suppose there are men who can get along by themselves, and be decent," remarked Adair. "But I need girl-ballast in my little ship, and if I had had it earlier I shouldn't have made such a confounded ass of myself."

"Then we can count it as all arranged—and I'm going to start at work on the play to-morrow."

"It may sound commonplace," said Adair, "but apart from your play, and success, and all that—I'd like to make her, well, you know—feel that she hadn't drawn such an awful blank in the husband-raffle. Oh, God, Reece, I've pulled her down to this—look at this place I've made her live in, will you?—And I shan't breathe a free breath till I get her out of it."

"It is in your own hands, Adair."

"Perhaps you overestimate my—well, what I can do?"

"No, I don't, and I'm not alone in that either. Fielman, Fordingham, Taylor, Niedringer—it's common talk with all of them. You can pull it off if you want to."

"Oh, Lord, don't say that again, Reece. If anybody on this mortal earth ever wanted to, it's me."

"Not another word then. You're satisfied and so am I; and if you should ever feel discouraged, remember there are only about thirteen men in America who can act, and you are one of them, and not the last, either. Let's call in that charming wife of yours, and see if she doesn't agree with me."

Rolls Reece secured a six weeks' engagement for Adair in a play of his called *The Upstarts*, that was touring Washington, Baltimore, Syracuse, Cincinnati, and what are called the near-by cities. The hundred and fifty dollars a week seemed a veritable fortune, though it was judged wiser to husband it by letting Phyllis remain in New York, and thus save the heavy traveling expenses that would otherwise have been incurred for her. The dormice had learned the value of money with a vengeance. Adair himself, once the most careless of spenders, now showed an economy that was laughable and pathetic. He foreswore cigars; lived in the cheapest of cheap boarding-houses; grudged every penny that could be saved. There was to be no more shingle for dormice, but a warm little nest lined with

green bills, from which, in hard times, they could put out their little noses unafraid.

Rolls Reece expected to secure him another engagement with a western company to fill in the summer months; and with such an agent enlisted in his service the most spendthrift of actors needed to have taken no thought for the future. But Adair, who never did anything by halves, was cautious to the point of penury. He was determined Phyllis should never suffer such privations again, and those who called him miserly and mean little suspected the reasons that made him appear so. Phyllis herself was kept in the dark lest she should emulate his example; and the savings-bank account rose and rose without her having the least knowledge of it. The equivalent of cabs, good dinners, cigars, wine, expensive rooms, and Pullman berths stacked themselves in that yellow pass-book, and bore witness to a stoical self-denial. No more shingles for dormice, thank you!

In spite of the separation Phyllis was not unhappy during those long, silent days. Spring was in the air, and her heart, too, basked in that inner sunshine of contentment and hope. Like a weary little soldier she was glad to rest on the battlefield beside the parked cannon, and enjoy the contemplation of victory. Body and soul had been sorely tried; the reaction left both in a sweet languor; it was pleasant to do nothing; to lie back dreaming.

Rolls Reece came often to see her, and many a day they spent in his big motor racing over the snowy landscape of Long Island or Westchester County. He sent her flowers; he was assiduous in the little attentions women like; he was always so cheerful, so helpful, so kind. For him it was an intimacy that might have had a dangerous ending. He was perilously near falling desperately in love with Phyllis, and the latter never showed more address than in the way she guided him past the rock on which their friendship might have foundered. She was quite frank about it—disarmingly frank. She liked him too well to lose him, and told him so, and was prettily imperious with him, and yet never provocative nor coquettish. A man and woman friendship is nothing without sentiment, but it has to be a loyal, tender sentiment, that can cause neither the least self-reproach. Rolls Reece slipped by the rock unhurt, admiring as he did so theadroitness of the young beauty whom he knew had grown so fond of him. As to that there was never any question—it was self-confessed—and being a man he was naturally flattered and pleased.

But he was high-bred, sensitive, clever, and innately a gentleman, with an unusual perception, and a taste for the rarer and finer qualities of women. Others in his place might have persevered harder, and then turned sullen. He did neither. Indeed, Phyllis' whole love-story, as it came out by degrees, touched

him profoundly. Her audacity, her daring, her blind reckless headlong surrender to the man that had captivated her—all these to him were more than moving. A woman that could stake everything for love was altogether to Rolls Reece's taste. And Phyllis had not only staked everything, but had succeeded in the more difficult task of making love endure and grow. There were many subjects on which she knew nothing; she could not have told the name of the vice-president, and she thought the Balkans were in South America, but when it came to love the dramatist was amazed at her profundity. On this topic, however, the one topic that seriously interested her, she had an insight and a knowledge, not to speak of a whole whimsical vocabulary that made Reece appreciate his own shortcomings. Love, passion, sex—these were the real things of life and that demure brown head was insatiably concerned with them.

Of course, the new play, too, came in for an endless amount of talk and discussion. It was to be called *The Firebrand*, and every few days Rolls Reece had a little sheaf of manuscript to read to her. It dealt with a young man, who, in the whirl of politics, had secured the place of a police-court magistrate in a low quarter of Chicago. The suffering, misery and injustice thus passing in review before him, first startles and then rouses a nature passionately sympathetic and humane. His decisions are original, picturesque, and conventions are torn to pieces. He clashes with the boss who has put him into office, and defies him. The young judge makes enemies right and left; alienates the family of the girl he is engaged to; is sold up at auction through liabilities assumed on behalf of a children's society he has started.

The boss leads in the machinations to ruin him, which is made the easier by the firebrand's own hot-headedness and indiscretion; the third act is in an assignation house where the judge is trapped. He explains his innocence to his triumphant tormentors; he tells of the half-grown girl he has trailed there, and appeals, with a fine outburst, to their humanity to help him save her; the boss refuses, and taunts him with the scandal that next day will shake Chicago. Then the judge plays his trump card, and tells them what he had been trying to hold back, that the girl is no other than the boss' own daughter; and smashing open a door discloses her and the satyr, who has brought her there. This, in brief, was the play, shorn of all its externals—an intense, powerful, essentially modern play, brutally real, and yet animated by a burning purpose, and a resentment no less fiery against the diabolical misgovernment of our large cities.

Rolls Reece labeled it "dangerous goods," which in truth it was, and was correspondingly uplifted. He said he was tired of writing sugar-candy plays, and wished to show his detractors that he could grapple with big emotions as well as the lesser, pink-tea femininities with which his name was always associated. "And remember, Mrs. Adair," he explained, "I don't want a goody-goody young

man with a benevolent forehead and a spotless past, and a Y.M.C.A. accent—but an impatient, chip-on-his-shoulder, impulsive fellow, who would like to get off the bench and fight somebody. It’s a Cyril Adair play, and I am going to fit him as carefully as a Fifth Avenue tailor. And on the police-court judge side of it, I am going to show the public the colossal power those men have for good or evil. They can blight more human lives in one morning than the whole Supreme Court could do in ten years. In their dingy little field they are absolute monarchs, from which there is no appeal. We owe thousands of criminals to their crass stupidity, and when they work in collusion with corrupt politicians they are a scourge and a terror to every decent man or woman in their midst.”

The dramatist had referred several times to a friend of his, Andrew Hexham, whom he particularly wished Phyllis and Adair to meet. Ordinarily so frank he was somewhat hazy and mysterious in his references to this personage, who apparently was a man of large fortune, and of considerable importance in theatrical affairs. Once Reece dropped his play, and went off for three days—an extraordinary lapse from his habit of persistent industry—and on his return mentioned he had been, staying with Hexham, smiling in a queer, guilty kind of way that tantalized Phyllis’ curiosity. But nothing could be got out of him—at least nothing that could explain his singular entertainment whenever Hexham’s name came up. It seemed, however, that this man had to be won over; that *The Firebrand* was in some dim manner dependent on his good will; that he was a fussy, troublesome, dictatorial person, not a little prejudiced against Adair. This had to be overcome at a meeting; and Phyllis, especially, was commanded to go out of her way to be “nice to him”—“You’re such an irresistible little baggage when you choose,” said Rolls Reece. “I want you to tie him up in bow-knots, just as you tied me, to dazzle him, and then we’ll sign the contract right there before he can undazzle himself.”

“I’m not much good at fascinating people unless I like them,” returned Phyllis ingenuously and doubtfully.

“Oh, you’ll like him,” protested Reece. “I’ll answer for that, you know.”

“Well, I’ll do my best,” said Phyllis, wondering to herself what it all meant. “I’ll sit very close, and make dachshund eyes at him, and encourage him to talk about himself. That’s the secret of woman’s charm when you analyze it. See how it caught you!”

It was too bad, though, that Rolls Reece should have chosen the Sunday that Adair ran over from Philadelphia, where *The Upstarts* was booked for a week. The pair had been separated for nearly four weeks, and Phyllis wanted her husband all

to herself. Rolls Reece, Andrew Hexham, even *The Firebrand* itself, were very secondary things when weighed against the rapture of Adair's return. She pleaded with Rolls Reece to postpone the meeting until Monday afternoon, but the dramatist with unexpected obstinacy stood out for Sunday evening. Hints were lost on him, and even some pink-cheeked, shy, half-murmured things merely made him laugh instead of relenting.—Sunday night it had to be.

But to do him justice, the dramatist tempered severity with his usual generosity. He sent a prodigal amount of flowers, as well as a case of champagne, and would have contributed his colored butler had he been allowed—which he wasn't. Phyllis said that the Pest Person (as all that day she hotly called Mr. Hexham)—the Pest Person had to take them as they were, and if there was one thing worse than a hired butler, it was a borrowed one. If the Pest Person didn't like the way he was treated—if he were the sort of Pest Person who judged people by striped nigger-trousers and gilt chandeliers, why, he could just go to the devil.—Which went to show, incidentally, how good that four weeks' rest had been for Phyllis, and how fast she was getting back her former spirit.

At nine that evening Adair and Phyllis were both waiting for their visitors. True to her promise to Rolls Reece the latter had dressed herself with unusual care; and Adair, who was allowed to see but not touch, swore she had never looked more ravishing. Her fresh young womanhood entranced him; she was so slender, so graceful, so girlish, and the red rose in her hair was not more exquisite. What a beauty she was! How altogether perfect from the top of her dark head to her trim little feet!—And the saucy mouth that was always ready to part on the dazzling teeth; the low, sweet, eager voice; the bubbling, caressing laugh—after four weeks of loneliness, of dismal, dreary separation, it was as though he had never really appreciated them before; and it was intolerable to be stuck to a chair and forbidden to move when everything in him bade him seize her in his arms, and assert his master's right.

Worst still, Rolls Reece and the Pest Person were late. The minutes ticked away—five past, ten past, a quarter past, twenty past—and yet there was neither dramatist nor Pest.—Ah, there they were at last! Phyllis ran to admit them, fumbling at the latch of the door in her excitement. She opened it on the dimly-lighted landing, and held out both hands in welcome to Rolls Reece, who stood before her. His friend was hidden in the shadow, but as she glanced towards him recognition suddenly pierced her heart. It was her father!

All he said was her name, and that so humbly, and with an intonation so affecting that she flung her arms about him in a paroxysm of tenderness, unmindful of everything save the love that suddenly flooded her whole being. Misunder-

standing, self-justification, the rights or wrongs of their unhappy estrangement—all were forgotten, all were swept away. Clinging to him she guided him along the passageway and into the sitting-room, where Adair, bewildered and astonished, was waiting to receive them. Even in the throes of that tumultuous moment Phyllis, trying to see with her father's eyes, took in Adair with a welling pride. Never had he appeared to her more manly, more distinguished or noble; and when she said: "My husband, Daddy," it was with a little air that told of her own content with the man of her choice.

"I am here in the character of a repentant father, with ashes on his head," said Mr. Ladd; and going up to Adair, held out his hand. "Will you not forgive me?" he asked, "and may we not be friends?"

Rolls Reece had looked forward to being present at this evening of reconciliation; of being patted on the back for the big part he had taken in it; of drinking his own champagne amid the ensuing festivity and joy. But as he saw the two men's hands meet and grasp; as he saw Phyllis press between them, her eyes suffusing, and sobs choking her utterance, he realized that he was gazing at a scene too sacred for him to share. He silently effaced himself, shut the door without noise, and tiptoed down the stairs.

"It's a good world," he murmured to himself, "yes, a damned good world; and in spite of what people say, things often work out right."

THE END

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