THE ARCH-SATIRIST

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THE ARCH-SATIRIST

BY

FRANCES DE WOLFE FENWICK

"The least we can do is to apologize,
and we do it—thus." —Page, 299

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ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES COPELAND

"Justice had been done, and Time, the Arch-Satirist,
had had his joke out."—THOMAS HARDY.

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THE ARCH-SATIRIST

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THE ARCH-SATIRIST

CHAPTER I
"HALF DEVIL AND HALF CHILD"

"Then the preacher preached of Sin ... fair of flower and bitter of fruit."—*Juliana Horatia Ewing.*

"To me the idea of slaving for a life-time in order to die rich is a pitiful sort of insanity. That's the Italian in me, I suppose. I would think it wiser to drink—drink deep and long and gloriously—and die of it—die in a ditch if necessary! *Then* I would have lived some sort of life, anyway, and enjoyed it after my fashion. But I'm not going to live or die that way. I'm going to take everything in life that's worth having, and I'm going to enjoy—and enjoy—and enjoy! The devil, himself, can't cheat me of it. I've long arrears of happiness to make up and by God——*I'll make them!*" The speaker broke off, coughing horribly; a gleam of intense rage shone in his great, wild eyes and his thin nostrils quivered, furiously. Poor slight earth-worm! caught in the whirlwind of Destiny and tossed hither and thither! compelled to falsify his weak boasts even as he uttered them! The man who sat opposite, smoking and lounging in the dim light of the studio, withdrew his gaze with an effort from his visitor's frail form and frenzied face; there seemed something indecent in gazing thus openly at the contortions of a naked soul.

"Have a little hot Scotch for the cough," he suggested, reluctantly. "What's the use? I may just as well give it to him, here," he added to himself. "The boy's trebly doomed and a drop more or less isn't going to make any difference either way." He busied himself with a spirit lamp and glasses and soon his visitor was gulping down the proffered draught, greedily.

"That's good!" he exclaimed. "That puts life in me. I feel as if I could write something now—something worth while."

"Something unfit for reading, I suppose you mean," returned his host, cheerfully.

The boy laughed easily and settled back among the cushions of his easy chair with panther-like grace.

"Not a bit of it," he answered, gaily. "I only write them after gin. The best thing I ever did was gin—'Sin's Lure.' You read it?"

"I did."

"Strong, wasn't it?"

"Strong, yes. So is a—so are various other things strong. Just the sort of thing a diseased, vice-racked, dissipated young—genius—like you might be expected to produce. What bothers me now is your prose. Anything more uncharacteristic"—

The boy laughed and gazed at the older man, intently and mischievously.

"Nothing morbid about that, is there?"

"Nothing. Bright, dainty, unerringly truthful, delightfully witty—how in thunder do you do it? You must have two souls."

"Two! I've got a dozen."

The boy lit a cigarette and puffed it, meditatively. The man smoked a well-coloured pipe and gazed steadily at his visitor. Seen thus, they were an ill-assorted pair.

Gerald Amherst, the owner of the studio, was an artist, uncursed overmuch by the artistic temperament. His strong, sane face and massive figure suggested the athlete, the pose and substance of his attitude the successful business man. Nor did the omens lie. He was an athlete in his leisure moments, a business man at all times. Art was his occupation, his delight; but he never forgot that she was also his bread-winner. Amherst painted good, sometimes exceptional pictures; and he demanded—and obtained—good, sometimes exceptional prices for them. For the rest he was thirty-four, fine-looking, well-bred, honest—and popular. Friends came to him as flies come in July to ordinary mortals.

So alien was his visitor that he hardly seemed to belong to the same world. Lithe, long-limbed, sinuous, with features of almost feminine delicacy and charm and hands that made the artist soul in Gerald vibrate pleasurably. The eyes—deep-set, hollow, passionate—were the eyes of a lost soul; impenetrable, fathomless, and lurid.

Strange, alluring, repellent personality! where the seeds of a thousand sins—sown centuries before—bore hideous fruit. Madness, vice, disease, and death—and, through them all, the golden fire of genius! This boy's age was nineteen; and no second glance was needed to tell that the fierce, straining spirit must soon leave its wretched tenement behind and fare forth into darkness. In the meantime—Amherst puffed at his pipe and thought. A year ago this boy had

been a pet and idol of Montreal society; to-day his open corruptness had closed all doors to him save those of a few, who, like Amherst, forgave the madman in the genius, and the beast in the dying boy.

Then, too, our hero was an artist; and Leo Ricossia was a model such as artist seldom sees. He was graceful as some young wild animal; his delicately nervous body could form no pose that was not pleasing. As for his face—thin-lipped, wide-eyed, luminous—"Ricossia will never write a poem so wonderful as his face," a brother-artist had once remarked; and Amherst fully concurred in the opinion.

Ricossia spoke presently, his dark eyes heavy with thought.

"You think it possible that one may have ten souls?"

"I think it probable that one soul may have twenty outlooks, and all of them vile, when he has soaked in sufficient gin. But how an unhealthy mind can produce healthy stuff—that's beyond me. Your prose is healthy, and what's more, it's fine. It ranks with"—He stopped abruptly, amazed and confounded by the glitter in Ricossia's eye.

"You—you don't think it better than my poetry? You can't!"

"I think—in a sense—it is better!" Amherst spoke slowly and Ricossia leaned forward to catch his words with an avidity which seemed disproportioned to the matter in hand. "In another sense it's not so good, of course. The poems are unhealthy, feverish, abnormal—but, in their way, they're efforts of genius. The stories are simply very unusually clever prose—healthy, witty, and clean. Personally I prefer them."

"You—you miserable Philistine!"

The boy leaned back as though relieved and his scarlet lips parted in a smile of startling sweetness. The eyes had lost their wild gleam now and were simply wells of dusky kindness and fellowship; the eyes of an intelligent, friendly brute with something added. Gerald noted the change with unflagging interest; as a study the boy never palled.

"You think I'm a bad lot, don't you?"

"I think you're as bad as the worst. But a chap like you isn't to be judged by ordinary standards."

"Yet," pursued Ricossia, slowly, "you allow that I can write clean stuff. Perhaps in spite of it all, underneath it all—my soul is clean."

"I hope so; but I don't believe it for a moment. No, I can't account for it that way."

"Possibly," suggested the other, puffing fitfully, "possibly, then, my unclean spirit has gained control of some healthy, human soul which it dominates."

"Possibly you're talking awful rot," returned the other, good-humouredly but a trifle impatiently.

"Possibly I am."

The poet smiled softly and leaned back, making a lovely thing of the corner where he lounged.

"Healthy people often have a liking for me," he observed. "You, for instance—the healthiest man I know. And the healthiest woman—Miss Thayer."

"That'll do."

"What do you mean?"

"That you mustn't speak of her."

"Why?"

"You ought to know."

The boy stared, uncomprehendingly; then threw himself back, chuckling inaudibly.

"You didn't understand me," he said at last, his beautiful eyes bright with amusement. "She has far too much sense to be attracted by me in the ordinary way. I meant only"—

"I don't care what you meant. I don't like to talk to you about her and I won't. If she did bestow a good deal of attention on you at one time it was before she knew your real character; she regarded you just as a sick, inspired boy. None of them ever speak of you, now; you ought to know that."

Ricossia fixed his great eyes on the speaker's face with an impenetrable expression, then shook with silent laughter.

"We'll talk on some less delicate subject," he said at last with a keen, bright glance at the other man, replete with subtle mockery. "Still," he added, softly, "you'll allow—leaving all personalities out of the question—that I have a magnetic attraction for all women, good and bad—even if I am ostracized from polite society."

"I'll allow nothing—I don't want to discuss it, I tell you," said Amherst, irritably. "There are some things and some people one doesn't care to hear you mention, you young— Can't you understand that?"

"Perfectly!" returned the boy, laughing. His laugh was an uncanny thing, so melodious and bell-like as to be startlingly unmasculine. Amherst liked it no better than the rest of him—and found it equally attractive.

After all, he mused, his momentary irritation subsiding, our ideas of what a man should be were arbitrary. Certainly there was a beauty of disease; a beauty even of corruption, which, while no one cared to imitate, no one, on the other hand, could deny the existence of. Here was a living example; the scapegoat of heredity, laden down with sin, weighted with disease, yet possessed of how many goodly gifts! And all to end in—what? The passion of the hot heart, the sweat of the over-active brain—all, all for nothing. An evil life and an early grave. Retribution, yes; but retribution, really, for the sins of the dead men whose deeds

lived, poisoning the life and rotting the blood in the veins of this, their human puppet. And these dead men, what of them? What of their life, endlessly self-renewed, unceasingly sinned against until this, the last representative of a name that had once been great, went to fertilize the waiting earth. "About all he is fit for, too," mused Gerald grimly enough, noting the signs plainly written on the face of the boy. Then his mood changed. How pitiful! This beautiful creature, in nature a cross between a satyr and an elfin, in face, nothing short of a god; this "vessel of a more ungainly make" "leaning all awry"; this marionette of the scornful gods, dancing gaily enough, to every tune the devil chose to play him; this strange, only half human being of the unbridled will, the untempered desires. And only nineteen!

The studio showed bright with candle-light and lamp-light. A fire of wood and coal glowed and chattered on the hearth. It was all very quiet, very restful. The boy still lingered among the rich-hued cushions and his face showed an unwonted sense of peace.

The poetic instincts which an Italian father, an Irish grandmother, had bequeathed to him responded amazingly to this atmosphere of cosy, sinless warmth. He was quite capable of rising to heights of extraordinary mental spirituality at such moments, though quite incapable of applying the first principle of morality to his daily life.

Gerald Amherst thought, as he had thought many times before, of the strange inequalities of life. Here was he, thirty-four, the possessor of a sound body, a clear conscience, a healthy mind and a sufficient income. He reflected on these various advantages with no sense of personal merit, feeling that they had been bequeathed to him as truly as had the old mahogany chest which formed one of the chief ornaments of his room. He had certainly started as well equipped as most to play the great game of life.

What if he, too, had had this boy's heritage? He tried, smiling a little, to imagine himself a Ricossia; a doomed, reckless, light-hearted being who chose to spend his few remaining years in hopeless vice. As he thought, a sudden pity for the boy overtook him as it had very often done before, a sudden curiosity as to what really transpired behind the black veil which we all hang between our inmost selves and the eyes of our fellow-humans. Did the boy ever feel regret or shame or loathing for himself or reluctance to continue in his vile career? Would he confess to it if he did? Amherst, pressed by a sudden desire to know more of his whimsical visitant, questioned him, soberly.

"I say—Leo!"

"Well, old man?"

"You've been going it a bit, lately, haven't you? Drinking pretty hard? Drugs, too, of some sort, I fancy. You look pretty seedy."

The boy started and glanced hastily in a polished, steel mirror which hung near. What he saw evidently re-assured him, for he tossed his black head and smiled, carelessly.

"I think I look pretty fit," he said, coolly. "I'd hate to think otherwise. My word! I don't know what I'd do if—some fellows show that sort of thing so. Swollen faces, purple round the nose and all that—you know?"

"I know."

"But I'm not in that class, yet, thank the Lord."

"Yes, but suppose the Lord went back on you and handed you the red nose and the pimples and all the other ornaments which rightfully belong to you—what then?"

"Then?—oh, then, I'd end it very quickly. I can't bear to have an ugly object in the room with me; do you think I could bear to be one myself? Chloral's painless."

"Yes, and cheap. The idea of suicide appeals to you, then?"

"Not especially," answered the boy, beginning to stir, restlessly. "But one must do something if the worst comes to the worst."

"I wonder, if you feel like that, that you continue to live. Do you really think your life's worth living?"

"No," answered Ricossia, calmly. "Do you think yours is?"

Gerald stopped half-way in an answer, struck by a sudden thought. *Was* his life worth living? It was a good life as lives go; but if he could exchange it now, to-night, for total oblivion, absolute insurance against future pain, old age, illness, sorrow—would he, or would he not? He hesitated.

"I ask you," pursued Ricossia, quietly, "because, just now, as I leaned back here in your comfortable chair with your fire dancing in my eyes and your good drink warming the very cockles of my heart, I thought of you and, for a moment, envied you. Then I thought of your life. Your tiresome routine of work, exercise, wholesome food, good air, sound sleep—God! how do you stand it? I'd go mad!"

"You think your own life preferable?"

"My life *is* life of a kind. My cough's a devilish nuisance but I can always purchase oblivion with a few cents—oblivion! Have you ever known what it is to want sleep? No? I thought not. Wait until you have. Then know what it is to want sleep *and to get it*; to drop off to slumber, lulled with pleasant thoughts, dreams, fancies, and to feel no pain, no bother, nothing but a delicious drowsiness. Of course the waking up is bad—but you don't think of that; if you did, I suppose you'd take a bigger dose once for all."

"I'm not paid to induce you to commit suicide, but, feeling as you do, I wonder what on earth you live for?"

"So do I. So do most of us. But of course there is only one answer to that

question; namely, that Nature has implanted in the breast of the tiniest insect that lives and crawls on the face of this globe not only the desire to live but the intention to live. It's an instinct. We all have it. Life is a horrible thing, really. This world is an unspeakable place. But none of us wants to leave it all the same. That may be because it is the only life we have or it may be because there's a worse life waiting. But I don't believe that, someway. Though the Creator seems pretty cruel at times I think perhaps old Khayyam did him no injustice. 'He's a good fellow and 'twill all be well.' And now, Amherst, yarning always makes me restless and dry and the night's still young. I'm going to get drunk."

"Hold on!" expostulated Amherst, genuinely shocked and startled, he could hardly tell why, at this most unexpected and unpleasant ending to their talk. "Don't do it, Ricossia. How can you? What—what can you expect from the 'Good Fellow' if you fly in his face, that way? It's devilish, that's what it is. Stay and let me fix you up for the night, you young fool, you!"

Ricossia laughed. "You're a funny old boy, Amherst," he observed, meditatively. "I wonder what it feels like to have a conscience. I'd rather have a drink—a series of drinks! 'My Clay with long oblivion has gone dry.' As for the 'Good Fellow'—I haven't seen anything of him, yet. Have you? But the other old Boy is howling to be fed, so I'm off. Good-night."

CHAPTER II
A VISIT TO AGATHA

"This life of ours is a wild Æolian harp of many a joyous
strain—
But under them all there runs a loud, perpetual wail as of
souls in pain."—*Longfellow.*

Agatha Ladilaw had made a pink dress and was embroidering it with roses. Each of us has some particular talent; Agatha's was dressmaking. Her parents were not wealthy and therefore she could not indulge in the "creations" affected by many of her friends; but by dint of constant industry, excellent taste and unusual skill, she contrived to be always charmingly costumed. True, with a figure that might have stepped out of a Fifth Avenue shop window and a face which any

colour rendered lovely, she did not confront the difficulties of ordinary mortals.

As physical perfection is rare and as Agatha Ladilaw was, in her way, an unusually fine specimen of purely mundane and limited loveliness, a pen picture of her as she sat may be of interest.

Nature in planning Agatha had done unusually well. She had not only bestowed upon her a great amount of comeliness, but she had, apparently, taken pride in finishing her work in a way that is not common. How often a pretty face is spoilt by an irregular nose, a large ear, an imperfect contour of cheek or brow! In Agatha's case, however, no pains had been spared to produce a thoroughly bewitching whole. While face and form were sufficiently classical in outline to satisfy the most exacting, there was a warmth, a colour, a radiance about her, born partly of exuberant youth, partly of brilliant health. Her eyes were wonderful; purple pansies, black-lashed, white-lidded; her hair was a ripe chestnut, deepening to auburn, lightening to gold. Her skin had that pure satin whiteness peculiar to extreme youth; her hands were plump, dimpled, tapering, with pink palms and transparent nails. Her teeth were white, tiny and sharp; when she smiled, her pink cheeks broke into enchanting dimples which added the last touch of enticement to her kitten-like charms.

Nature had planned her upon classic lines—a sort of pocket edition Venus. Agatha, however, after a careful perusal of the fashion plates every spring, moulded her figure in accordance with the latest "craze." When long waists and narrow hips held sway, Agatha presented a faultlessly correct outline; when the coquettish athlete adorned magazine covers, Agatha might have passed for her sister. How all this was accomplished with no injury to health is a mystery which only the corsetiere can solve; Agatha at all times might have sat for a picture of Hebe.

For the rest, she was slightly under medium height, a fact which she publicly deplored, but for which she was secretly grateful. She did not admire tall girls; in fact, she did not admire anybody or anything which differed very greatly from her extremely attractive self. She had an intense and artistic appreciation of her various good points and looked with pity on those to whom the fairies had been less lavish. One who came in for a share of this ingenuous pity was her cousin, Lynn Thayer.

This young lady had dropped in at the time the chapter opens, for a cup of tea, in accordance with a long-deferred promise. As she sank into an easy-chair and loosened her furs she smiled at Agatha with a smile which held no tinge of envy. For Lynn, while cherishing in common with many plain women an enthusiastic admiration for beauty, enjoyed it in much the same way that she enjoyed music; intensely, even emotionally, but impersonally. Notwithstanding, she attached an exaggerated importance to it and affected her small cousin more

than she otherwise might have done because she possessed it in such unstinted measure.

As she sat, idly watching Agatha's white fingers moving through the pink draperies of the gown which she was embroidering, the thought of Leo Ricossia occurred to her and she mentally compared them. Both were beautiful to an extraordinary degree; but Agatha's beauty suggested roses, kittens, Cupids, everything that was soft and appealing, exquisite and empty, while Ricossia's beauty suggested storm, flaming sunset, glorious music. His was, in short, the beauty of a young caged tiger, Agatha's the loveliness of a very perfect white Persian kitten. Lynn laughed as this simile presented itself to her mind; it seemed to her singularly apropos. What different worlds they inhabited, these two radiant young creatures! Ricossia represented the pagan element, Agatha was the last word of civilized young-ladyship. The world was wide enough to contain both; nay, this little, stately old city was wide enough for that. They lived within an hour's distance of one another, as far asunder in thought, life, knowledge, ideals as is this little earth from "the last star's uttermost distance."

Lynn Thayer's and Agatha Ladilaw's mothers had been sisters and both had been beauties. Lynn, however, as her maternal relatives were fond of remarking, had "taken after her father." Though her face was pleasing it was rather plain; plain, not ugly; for its plainness consisted rather in lack of positive beauty than in any particular defect. Her hair was brown and abundant, her eyes deep-set and giving the effect of brown to the casual observer, although, as a matter of fact, they were a dark greyish green. Her skin was colourless, her mouth, large and thin-lipped, her nose, ordinary. However, her figure was excellent of its kind, tall, straight, flat-backed, and, while delicately proportioned, giving the effect of considerable reserve strength. Her movements, too, were graceful, but graceful somewhat as a young boy's are graceful, alert, easy, noiseless and entirely lacking in effort or self-consciousness. Perhaps her only positive beauty consisted in her teeth which, though not dainty like Agatha's, were white and regular. It would hardly be fair to say that her face lacked expression, but it was not a mobile face; habits of self-control and repression had stamped themselves too deeply in her nature not to show elsewhere. Her bearing was dignified and even distinguished and her voice well-modulated and soft. As a whole, she was the sort of girl whom one might meet any day in any city of the continent; a girl who was no longer young, yet showed no signs of age; a girl who could never be pretty, yet would hardly be considered ugly; a girl who wore dark coloured tailor-made costumes and looked like a lady in them; a girl who closely resembled scores of other girls the world over.

Lynn Thayer occupied a somewhat unusual position in Montreal. Her mother had been a pretty woman of fashion, her father a well-to-do man. How-

ever, her father dying shortly after his marriage and her mother losing all her money in a way which shall be explained elsewhere, Lynn had been left penniless. Her father's only living brother had offered her a home and a dress allowance; but she had refused the latter, had qualified as a public school teacher, and was earning a regular salary in one of the Board Schools. As both her father's and her mother's relatives were people of some wealth and much social standing, she occupied an anomalous position in what is known as "society." As a young girl she had "gone out" quite a little; now for reasons which shall presently develop, she went only to the homes of intimate friends and was seldom seen in public.

Oddly enough Lynn Thayer possessed a considerable fascination for both sexes. All men and most women liked her. She had never been pretty and was no longer a young girl, but her attraction had rather augmented than diminished as time went by. Debutantes, secure in the possession of unimpeachable gowns and rosy cheeks, often looked with amazement at the alacrity with which their partners left them for a dance with Miss Thayer. Probably these same partners would have found it difficult to explain why, themselves. Lynn always created the impression that she was a nice girl; a positive "nice girl," not a negative "nice girl." People liked her. Children "took to her" at once, dogs followed her; cats jumped on her knee without waiting for an invitation. Beyond an admirable figure and a pretty wit she possessed no surface charms; but something about her attracted and inspired confidence and trust. It is difficult to say why one excellent person is universally liked, another excellent person universally detested, another excellent person universally respected and shunned. Lynn Thayer belonged to the first class, that was all.

Certainly no two girls could resemble one another less than the cousins. Lynn was at best "a nice-looking girl," Agatha was "a dream." She showed to excellent advantage, too, in her mother's house where everything had been planned with an eye to the petted daughter as the central figure.

It was a very pretty sitting-room where Agatha Ladilaw sat, this cold January day. Without, the sharp air cut like a knife; within, all was comfort, warmth, cosiness. It would be difficult to imagine Agatha in anything but elegant and graceful surroundings. She was like a lovely, white, Persian kitten who had fed on cream and lain on cushions all her life; and, someway, one always knew that she would continue to feed on cream and lie on silk even if she lost her fur and her teeth in the course of time. If certain natures carry within themselves the elements of tragedy, others carry within themselves not only the desire for the soft things of life but the capacity for obtaining them. To the latter class Agatha undoubtedly belonged. Her beautiful aunt, Lynn's mother, had made rather a mess of her life, in spite of the fact that she had had all and more than Agatha possessed in the way of beauty and fascination. One knew instinctively that Agatha would

never fall into her mistakes. In the first place she would not wait till twenty-five before marrying; in the second place she would never dislike any man who fed and clothed her sumptuously; in the third place she would never be carried away by any indiscreet and expensive infatuation. In short Agatha was quite the most correct thing in young ladies, eminently satisfactory and desirable.

The room where Agatha liked to sit with embroidery or sewing was long, low, light. The bay-window was filled with plants, and the fragrance of mignonette and jasmine hung about the rose-coloured curtains which draped the alcove and separated it from the rest of the room. The furniture was light and artistic rather than costly; easy chairs upholstered in rose-patterned chintz; mission-wood tables, bookcases and "rockers"; the inevitable "cosy corner," cushioned to the last degree of comfort; a green carpet displaying a border of various-coloured roses; a silver-laden tea-table, a table containing books and magazines—mostly uncut; another containing one beautiful vase of cut flowers. Presently, when dusk arrived, the room would be suffused with rose-coloured lamp-light, but, at present, the winter sun flooding the room and the tiny fire which burned on the hearth gave a sufficient suggestion of cheer.

Agatha in her pink environment sewing on a pink dress gave one a delightful sense of the eternal fitness of things. One forgot, for the time being, the bitter January wind howling outside, the flock of black cares that dog the footsteps of ordinary mortals. Agatha certainly had her place in the scheme of the universe, just as the Persian kitten has. If the kitten were thrust out into the world and told to earn its cream—that would be another story.

Agatha, as has before been stated, would never have to earn her cream, otherwise than by existing and ornamenting. She would always be cheerfully ready to pay for it whenever necessary in the coin with which Nature had so richly endowed her. Therefore it will at once be seen that Agatha was a most satisfactory girl; everything that a young lady ought to be; just the sort of person who could be depended upon to give Society no shocks and her parents no anxiety.

Lynn almost wished that Agatha would not think it necessary to talk; the fire-lit, rose-decorated room and the beautiful little occupant who sat, absorbed in her draperies, were both so eminently satisfactory from an artistic point of view that she would have preferred to lounge idly, and enjoy them. Everything about Agatha was so attractive, so feminine, in such charming taste. The delicate white fingers moving in and out of the pink draperies; the graceful pose of the pretty figure in the easy chair; the absorbed, almost spiritual expression of the great, violet eyes; all charmed Lynn, even while she realized their misleadingness and realized, too, that, by breaking into these absorbed meditations, one was liable to disturb nothing more important than the set of an imaginary train. Soon, however, Agatha spoke; slowly and with something resembling an effort.

"Lynn, what do you think of Harry Shaftan, the General's nephew?"

"He's a nice boy."

"Nicer than Howard Pyle or Jimmy Gresham?"

"I believe I like him better."

"What do you think of the others?"

"Why? Are you engaged to any of them?" asked Lynn, laughing.

"Oh, no! That is—I mean to say—yes. I mean, I'm engaged to them all."

Lynn leaned back and gasped. Agatha continued to embroider.

"And—may I ask which one you intend to marry?"

"I don't know, exactly," confessed Agatha, poising her needle on her pink lip and gazing reflectively heavenward. "They're all nice; but I don't think I'll marry any of them."

"Agatha Ladilaw! What do you mean?"

"Why, lots of engagements are broken," said Agatha, looking surprised. "Lots and lots of them. If I found that I didn't really love any of these men—that the real passion of my life was yet to come—you wouldn't advise me to marry them, would you?" She looked at her cousin with an air of virtuous surprise and Lynn shouted.

"Oh, Agatha, you're a treat!" she exclaimed, with intense enjoyment. "A veritable, living treat!"

"I really don't see why," said Agatha, coldly, proceeding to thread a needle with an offended air. "And if you're going to laugh about serious subjects like love and marriage, why, I won't talk about them, that's all."

This consummation was far from Lynn's desire; and by dint of earnest and respectful entreaties she finally induced her small cousin to continue.

"What made you accept them all in the first place?" she asked with interest.

"Why, they all wanted me," said Agatha, simply. "And it's so hard to say no to a nice man. Even if he isn't nice, it's not easy. And you said yourself that they"—

"But, Agatha?"

"Yes?"

"Doesn't it seem queer to—well, to let three men kiss you at the same time?"

"The idea!" said Agatha, haughtily. "Of course they don't all do it at once. I very seldom see more than one of them in the same evening."

"Oh, don't be silly, Agatha; you must know what I mean. Doesn't it seem—isn't it a little hard to"—

"Why, no," said Agatha, staring, "it's the easiest thing in the world."

"Dear me! You don't feel at all sneaky or confused about it?"

"Confused? Why, no. You see, I've always been engaged to two or three people more or less ever since I was fifteen; of course before that it wasn't really

necessary."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, to be engaged, you know! one didn't have to be. But after you're fifteen, it seems rather fast, somehow, to let people kiss you that you're not engaged to."

"I had no idea you were so particular," murmured Lynn, bending down to hide a smile.

"Oh, I always think a girl can't be too particular about those things," said Agatha, firmly. "Because suppose someone happened to see you! All you have to do then is to say, 'To tell you the truth, I'm engaged to Mr. ——,' whichever one it was. And there you are!"

"And suppose the same person found you with one of the others—what then?"

"Oh, that would be very unlucky. I don't believe I would ever be so unlucky as that. And, Lynn, now that I have taken you into my confidence and told you things, won't you make a friend of me? and let me give you a little advice?"

"Why, yes," said Lynn, smiling.

"It's about Mr. Lighton. You know he is so eligible and it would be so dreadful if, by any mismanagement, you let him slip through your fingers."

"Oh!"

"Yes, indeed; and men are so deceitful," continued Agatha, piously, "you can't tell a thing about them, you really can't. Now there was a case I knew; it was something like yours only not so disappointing, for the man had only two thousand a year. But he kept running after this girl, just the way Lighton does after you, and everybody thought he meant something. People kept expecting to hear the engagement announced; but it never came off."

"What was the trouble?"

"Why, you know, it was the queerest thing! he kept calling and calling and every time you'd think he was going to propose; but *he never did.* So the girl got mad. She said she simply wasn't going to stand it a moment longer, so she packed her trunk and went off to stay with some people in Toronto. She was not going to have any such nonsense. But it didn't do any good, for he married some one else."

"What a sad story!"

"Isn't it?" agreed Agatha, oblivious of sarcasm. "But she was very lucky, for she met someone who had quite six hundred a year more than the first man had, and he proposed to her quite quickly, and so then of course they were married, and I sent them a centrepiece that I had embroidered, myself. It was a very handsome one but you see Toronto is a nice place to stay in."

"Oh, I quite see why you sent it. I also see why you told me the story. It

has a moral. If the man who is rushing you doesn't propose after a reasonable space of time—go to Toronto! Isn't that the idea?"

"You are so clever," said Agatha with an apologetic smile, "that sometimes I don't quite understand you. But if you mean that you think that I am advising you to go to Toronto, that isn't right, because any other place would do as well. Except that, of course, there are quite a good many men in Toronto."

"And you think that one of them might be induced to accept me?"

"Why not?" said Agatha, encouragingly. "But, of course, you wouldn't be at all likely to make another match like Mr. Lighton. So that is why I want you to be so particularly careful. You don't take these things seriously enough, Lynn, you know you don't. You must remember that you are getting on."

"Every year brings me nearer the grave, but no nearer matrimony," commented Lynn, assuming an appropriately funereal aspect.

"Oh, don't say that!" cried Agatha, looking genuinely shocked. "Please don't! It sounds so dreadfully as if it might be— And I am sure Mr. Lighton is most attentive and Mr. Amherst and two or three others call pretty often, don't they?"

"Yet," said her cousin, solemnly, "I think myself, Agatha, that there is just one little thing which is going to effectually prevent Mr. Lighton from marrying me. You mark my words! as sure as I stand here just so surely will I never be Mrs. Lighton. This one little obstacle is going to stand in the way."

"Why, what can it be?" queried Agatha, with intense interest.

"You have no idea?"

"Why, no."

"I thought that you wouldn't have," returned Lynn, very gravely.

"It won't prevent him from proposing, will it?"

"Not a bit of it. It will only prevent him from marrying—that is, from marrying me."

"Oh, how dreadful!" cried Agatha in genuine distress. "And to think of all the men you have refused, Lynn! and I suppose that there isn't one you could get back at a pinch."

"I fear not. The majority are either dead or married and the Grave and the Other Woman do not disburse."

"No, indeed," sighed her mentor. "And it's so necessary for you to marry, Lynn, for if Uncle Horace died to-morrow he would leave Aunt Lucy everything and there would be nothing left for you. Oh, what a pity that your mother's money was all spent."

"Yes, it seems a little unfortunate."

"That dreadful Italian! What a pity Aunt Clara married him after your father died. And didn't they have a son? What has become of him?"

"My dear Agatha, how should I know?" said Lynn, restlessly. "Don't you remember that, when Uncle Horace adopted me, he did it with the distinct understanding that I was to hold no communication with my mother and my little half-brother?"

"Oh, how dreadful! How could you bear to be parted from your own dear mother for ever?"

Lynn surveyed the questioner with a slight smile.

"Oh, I enjoyed the feeling that I brought in six hundred a year. I knew that it would procure my mother more pleasure than my society could, and that, with six hundred a year, her baby boy, and an occasional kiss from the biggest blackguard the Lord ever let loose on earth, she would be as happy as she could ever be. Poor mother! she was pretty, they say, even when she lay dead; her beauty didn't do her much good, but, on the other hand, my ugliness hasn't profited me, greatly. On the whole, I wish I looked like her."

"Aunt Clara was so awfully pretty and that Italian she married was so wonderfully handsome! the boy must have been a perfect little beauty."

"He was." Lynn spoke without enthusiasm.

"Weren't you fond of him?

"Very."

"Wouldn't you like to see him, again?"

"No—yes"—

"I don't believe you cared much about him, really."

Lynn looked at her and smiled.

"I was nine when he was born. My own father had died when I was a baby and my earliest recollections are those of seeing my mother crying half the day because my stepfather was out and laughing and chatting wildly because he was in. She never noticed me. I was an ugly little thing and she worshipped beauty—as I do. Besides, there are certain people who seem to suck the lifeblood of all who care for them, and my stepfather was of these; her love for him was a feverish thing, a thing that absorbed and tortured and finally killed her. Such is the perfect justice of the universe! no good man or woman ever receives that idolatrous love; it is only the vile, the utterly selfish, the heartlessly cruel—oh, here! what am I saying? To return to my story; I had a nurse till we grew too poor, then I looked after myself. Then ... the baby came. The baby! Oh, Agatha, if you had seen him! He was so beautiful, so utterly dear and heavenly, and no one had ever cared for me, and he—the very first time I saw him he put out his tiny hand and the little fingers twined about mine ... oh, my baby, my baby, how could I ever love anything in earth or heaven as I loved you? Well! for three years I was always with him and then—and then Uncle Horace wanted to adopt me, to rescue me, as he called it. And—I went. I was twelve years old at the time—in

years—and I realized, in the bitterest moment of my life, that to go meant money and comfort and pleasure for him—my idol! All I could do for him was to leave him—I saw it plainly—and I went without a word. I went. I wonder if any misery in after life can ever compare with the agony of that last hour when I sat, holding him in my arms and rocking him to and fro—and waiting. The carriage came at last to take me to the station and I kissed the wonderful little face and looked into the marvellous baby eyes and went! Oh, my baby, my baby, if I ever have a child of my own, will he, can he, ever be to me what you were, I wonder!—dear me, what a lot of nonsense I'm talking, Agatha! You mustn't mind."

"Not at all," said Agatha, politely, "it's interesting. I had no idea that you were so fond of babies, Lynn. But it seems so queer that you don't know where he is, now. What became of him when your mother died? He was about ten, wasn't he? for I remember you were nineteen."

"Yes, he was ten. Oh, he lived at school and then with his father till the latter died of consumption. That was two years ago."

"And now?"

"Why, now—he is probably living somewhere else. He is a man, you see, and able to take care of himself."

"But, oh, Lynn dear, you show so little feeling," said Agatha, with dainty reproach. "Not to care what has become of that boy—when you used to be so fond of him."

"Oh, we forget everybody and everything—in time," returned Lynn, listlessly. "At least," she added in a lower voice, "I hope we do."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Agatha, comfortably. "Lynn, did you ever see anything so sweet as that last rosebud I've just made? And it's given me such a lovely idea. The very next fancy dress ball I'm asked to, I'll go as the Queen of the Roses. Don't you think that will be lovely? Pale pink, you know, with garlands of rosebuds and a rose-wreath. Ring for tea, won't you, please? I'm dying for a cup, and it's getting too dark to work."

CHAPTER III

"FORSAKEN GUTS AND CREEKS"

"If we have loved but well
Under the sun,

Let the last morrow tell
What we have done."
—*Bliss Carman.*

On an exceptionally disreputable Montreal street stood a particularly unsavoury old studio building. Like other unsavoury things it had an interesting history, having, in its palmy days, belonged to an English duke. The duke was now dust and the studio building unpopular with the constabulary. Yet an air of former greatness enveloped it and its large, spacious halls and lofty ceilings bore mute and pathetic testimony to the grandeur of former days.

In an apartment which a duchess had once inhabited rats and spiders revelled, unrebuked, save when, once a week, a wild-eyed slattern clattered noisily in and attacked them with broom and scrubbing-brush. Sometimes the heavy old-fashioned door was locked and she went away rejoicing; sometimes it was merely closed, in which case she entered fearlessly and performed her tasks as expeditiously and abominably as possible. Frequently, during these revels, the lithe form of Mr. Ricossia might have been discerned, stretched upon the studio couch in deep and peaceful slumber. Even the prosaic and work-harrowed drudge of the Chatham was wont to pause occasionally and gaze with something approaching awe at the frail form and beautiful face of the opium-drugged consumptive. A spiritual majesty lay on his brow and his whole being seemed expressive of an unearthly peace and a sombre loveliness. Like some dark, fallen star he lay quiescent in the dim light of the studio; a thing to make one's heart ache when one reflected that he, too, was born of a human mother.

Mr. Ricossia's movements were uncertain, however; and one fine January evening found him sitting at the studio table, smoking and scribbling, busily. Presently the door opened; he looked up, pleasantly, showing no surprise, and bent over his writing.

"Just a minute!" he said, in a low voice.

The visitor nodded, closed the door quietly, and stood as though waiting. Presently she raised a thick veil and fixed her eyes intently on the writer. They were sombre eyes, not over large but somewhat expressive; and as she watched the other occupant of the studio, they dilated and glowed in a way that was almost fierce and wholly human. So might a fire-tortured martyr have regarded in death the symbol of his faith, the cross for which he died.

Presently the woman spoke.

"I can only stay a few minutes, my darling," she said in a low voice, vibrating with painful tenderness. "There is the money."

The boy sprang to his feet and grasped it, his dark eyes aflame with eager-

ness. Hastily, greedily, he counted it over, then put it in his pocket and turned to the woman with a brilliant smile.

"That is fine," he said, his flute-like voice making melody in the studio and in his hearer's heart. "You must have done well, lately. How much have you sold altogether?"

"A long story to the 'Alhambra,' a funny skit to the 'Woman's Hearth' and an article or two to some smaller concerns. Try to make it last, for I had to spend nearly all my month's salary—oh, Liol, Liol!"

A burst of coughing interrupted her and turned her wind-flushed face white. She stood in silence, knowing that nothing infuriated the dying boy like sympathy, and held her breath, waiting for the paroxysm to pass. So long did it last, however, that she forgot all caution and, rushing to the sick man's side, caught his hand and screamed aloud.

"Oh, Liol, Liol, do you want to kill me? Won't you go to that retreat? and try to live for my sake? Oh try, only try! I can't bear it! I thought I could, but I can't. Oh, for God's sake, go! try it, only try it for a little while"—

He snatched his hand away and flung himself on the couch, shaking with weakness and fury.

"Again?" he cried, raging. "You ask me again to go to one of those vile cures? after all I've said and sworn? God in Heaven! how often must I tell you that, if I've only a few months to live, I'm going to *live!* not die by inches. Fool that you are!"

She covered her face with her hands and turned away from him.

"Go to those beastly mountains," he snarled, venomously. "Go where all that makes life worth living will be out of reach and I dogged by a pack of vile, prying doctors and attendants! If you're tired of keeping me I'll take an extra dose and end it to-night!"

"Liol!"

"Then don't madden me! Here! you said you couldn't stay long, didn't you? My last poems are on the table. Send a couple more to 'Hosmer's Monthly'—they asked for them—God! is this another fit coming on? ... There! I feel better. It passes sometimes and I daresay I'll outlive you all, yet." His face brightened and became luminous with hope and defiance. The terrible paroxysm of coughing had flooded his dusky cheeks with rose; his black hair curled limply back from his damp forehead; his magnificent eyes expanded and fired with the consumptive's cheating illusion of future health. Beside his glowing, burning beauty Lynn Thayer seemed one of those daughters of earth who, in former ages, loved the sons of God. She devoured him with her eyes in a silence so tense and sorrow-laden that the very air seemed to vibrate with it.

"Ah God, how I love you," she said at last, hopelessly. "And you—oh, Liol,

Liol, you never even kissed me, to-night."

"What? Never even kissed you?" answered the other, good-humouredly. "Well, but, my dear old girl, you must remember that the fool doctors say that consumption's catching. They're right, too; I caught it from my father, curse him! I wouldn't be where I am to-day if it wasn't for him." His face darkened, moodily; then he shrugged his shoulders and held out his arms with a smile that was more mirthful than tender.

Lynn Thayer walked swiftly to the couch, dropped on her knees beside it and buried her face in the frail shoulder of its occupant. She remained thus for a few minutes while he wound thin arms about her and murmured endearments which held a perfunctory note even to her love-deafened ears. Presently she rose.

"Leo Ricossia is making quite a name by his prose writing," she said with forced cheerfulness. "I must try to keep it up, Liol. Do you remember when I called you 'Liol' once, before some people and they thought it so funny and we were so worried about it? Yet you see no one has ever suspected anything."

"No. If they did, I suppose it would have to come out," said the boy, slowly.

"What?"

Lynn started and looked confounded.

"What?" she cried. "Break my word to my dead mother? Tell who you are? how she made me promise to keep you and watch over you until you died and let no one know who you were?—What are you dreaming of, Liol?"

"Why, it's nothing to me," returned the other, watching her composedly. "Girls must go into heroics over something, I suppose; but you must see for yourself that all this would look pretty badly if it came out and wasn't explained, and it would hardly be worth while to lose your reputation and your home and your position too, for an oath to a dead woman. Too bad you have to come here by night, but, of course, day-time is impossible, for people would be sure to see you, whereas the chances are ten to one against it in the dark and dressed as you are. That absurd oath! What was it now? And she was going to come back and curse you, too, if you broke it, wasn't she?" He laughed.

"Our mother, Liol!" said Lynn, in a choked voice.

"Yes, our mother. I've almost forgotten what she looked like even, but I suppose you remember her better than I do, though I don't see why you should, considering the length of time that you were away from her and—see here, Lynn, you've been here an ungodly time; I don't want to hurry you, but—oh, I say! Amherst is puzzling his brains out as to how I can write such healthy, humourous prose. You would have shouted if you had heard him, the other night."

"Perhaps. But I must go, directly."

Lynn shivered and drew her fur a little more closely about her throat.

"I must go now, Liol," she repeated in a low voice. "Good-bye. And don't—

but there! what's the use of talking? Do as you please, dear; only try to love me a little if you can. You're all I've got."

"Mighty little at that, too! You have but little here below nor will you have that little long—there, don't look like that, old girl! I'm only joking, you know."

With this joke ringing in her ears Lynn left; passed down the rickety stairs, through the dark doorway, out upon the noisy street. It was not a savoury neighbourhood this, where her brother had elected to take up his abode. In fact, it was not a place for a lady at any hour of the day or night. In face of an overpowering compulsion, however, a woman sometimes forgets that she is a lady, and this was what had happened in Lynn's case. The love which, in the majority of instances, is divided among parents, brothers, sisters, husband, children, had been concentrated upon one object. A foolish vow exacted by a delirious and dying woman had become the important thing in Lynn Thayer's life, the keeping of it a sacred duty.

We are usually punished both for our follies and our virtues, and Lynn was certainly severely punished for hers. Ricossia, as he was called, in Montreal, kept her on a constant rack of uncertainty and suspense. Daily, hourly, she expected to hear of his death and, sometimes, in moments of more than usual bitterness and grief, she almost wished that he were safe in the grave and incapable of doing himself or her more harm. The unworthiness of the loved object, moreover, made life proportionately bitter; the necessity for constant deceit and stealth was a cruel necessity to one of her nature, and the witty tales which helped to procure her brother the luxuries he craved were frequently written in anguish of heart and despair of spirit. Poor Punchinello, dancing gaily on the night his love died and his heart was broken, has many a modern prototype.

Yet through all the disgust and grief which his nature and actions caused her, her love never faltered. To her, the drinking, drug-crazed youth in whose degenerate nature there was not a trace of anything high or kind was the baby brother of early days; the baby brother whom she had tended, adored, sacrificed and been sacrificed for during the most impressionable years of her life. The tiny creature had crept into the lonely heart of the child, satisfying every want, sweetening every bitterness. There had been nothing else in Lynn's life that had held comparison with this.

CHAPTER IV
A BRILLIANT MATCH

"Love is a pastime for one's youth; marriage, a provision for one's old age."—*Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler.*

"For life is not the thing we thought and not the thing we plan,
And woman, in a bitter world, must do the best she can."
—*Robert Service.*

In order that the reader may more fully understand the foregoing chapters and the predicament in which certain of the characters find themselves, it is necessary to ask him to return with us to a period some thirty years before, when a certain young lady, known as Clara Brooks, had just made a most sensible match.

Now, as this was the first sensible thing that Miss Brooks had ever been known to do, it naturally attracted some attention and created some discussion. For she was one of those impossible beings who want to be happy and who, instead of viewing happiness in the light of a series of discreetly conducted flirtations, ending in marriage with the most eligible of the flirtees, had persisted in prolonging these flirtations to a really indiscreet period of time and had even carried her folly so far as to refuse two or three really desirable offers. She had a vague yet fairly positive idea that marriage, in order to be at all happy or satisfactory, must be based on mutual love and esteem, and, because of this antiquated and most unfortunate notion, she had remained unmarried until the age of twenty-five.

This attitude of Clara's laid her open to much well-deserved censure. There were two opinions about it; the first being that she had no common sense, whatever; the second being that she was unfortunately romantic and fanciful, yet somewhat to be commended in that her ideals were of a slightly higher order than those of the average girl. There was not much truth in either of these views. Clara Brooks, like most of the rest of the world, was supremely selfish, though not unpleasantly so. She loved love; she also loved money; she wanted to be happy, whatever the price she paid for happiness; and she did not care to do anything that she thought likely to militate against her happiness. That was all.

It seemed very hard to Clara, who possessed beauty of quite an unusual order, a wheedling tongue, and a pretty taste in dress, that she could not marry both for love and money. She would have preferred to marry for love, however, if she had been obliged to make a choice. This was partly because she had never known poverty and could not compute its discomforts with any degree of accuracy; but, also, because she was one of those women who are capable of an overpowering infatuation and who are, therefore, instinctively on the watch for a possible object which may awaken it. The object had not appeared; Clara was

twenty-five, and twenty-five, at the period of which I write, was not the twenty-five of to-day. Only people of unusual fascination and prettiness, such as Miss Brooks, dared to be unmarried at twenty-five. Already her enemies were beginning to brand her with the awful stigma of "old maid," already her friends were beginning to murmur plaintively, "What can she be thinking about?"

Clara's thoughts ended in a very usual fashion. As Prince Charming had not arrived; as the time was fast approaching when she would be relegated to the dreadful social lumber room where all such derelicts of love were stowed by grieving relatives in the "good old days"; as enemies were, as has before been said, beginning to murmur "old maid" behind her back, and friends, "silly girl" to her face; for all these reasons and for fifty others, Clara Brooks suddenly made up her mind to accept a well-to-do and silent man, by name Lowden Thayer, who for some time past had been obviously attracted by her undoubted charms. Now the sky brightened for Clara. She, as a bride-to-be, received many handsome wedding presents, a number of compliments on her most unexpected good sense, and a vast amount of eminently imbecile advice from well-meaning ignoramuses of both sexes.

The wedding was a fine one; all Clara's relatives were pleased to know that she was settled and would be provided for until the day of her death no matter how ugly or unpleasant or incapable she became with age; and all Lowden Thayer's relatives were pleased to think that he had married at all, though the majority of them felt that he had made a most unsuitable choice. Wherein they were undoubtedly right.

After the honeymoon, the Thayers took up their abode in a handsome house in a fashionable quarter of Montreal; the gentleman went to business every day and the lady began to receive and return calls from the elite of what is known as "society."

She had many calls of all kinds to return, for she had fulfilled the whole duty of civilized woman; she had married, and married well. Within a year she further absolved herself of blame by bringing into the world a little, helpless infant, bald and thin and red-faced, who howled most objectionably and seemed as indignant at having existence thus forced upon it as though it knew what existence really was. Probably it was no prophetic instinct but some more prosaic ailment that led Clara's infant daughter to make night hideous with her cries. Be that as it may, its mother conceived something that almost amounted to dislike for the ugly little voyager upon the sea of life for whose existence she was responsible. She loved men and boys; why then should she give birth to a daughter? She loved beauty; why should her first-born be devoid even of hair? Besides ... the baby resembled its father; the "good match" which Fate had compelled her to make, much against her wishes; the detested crumple in her bed of roses; the hated

benefactor to whose unwise fancy she was indebted for board and clothing, place in society and honourable title of "married woman"; the loathed necessity which spoilt everything—even her child—for her.

This much, however, must be said for Clara Thayer; though the child meant less than nothing to her, she did not neglect it on that account. She may have been an unnatural mother, but she was not a soulless brute, and she therefore attended carefully to its wants and saw that it lacked for nothing that she could give it. What she could not give it, it necessarily went without; but she did her duty so far as she was able and was unexpectedly and munificently rewarded. For when her little girl was three years of age its father died, leaving her a wealthy and beautiful widow.

Now when Fortune is too kind to us Fate sometimes plays a grim joke, in order to level us with the vast mass of toiling, yearning, disappointed, suffering fellow-humans. This is what Fate did with Clara Thayer.

She was young, rich, beautiful, able to marry whom she pleased and live as she liked without let or hindrance. Fate had given her good coin with which to purchase anything her vagrant fancy might light upon. She might have chosen whom she would. Therefore she chose an extremely good-looking scoundrel whose Irish mother and Italian father had bequeathed to him, together with the light-hearted fascinations of their kindred natures, the sum total of every vice of which both lands are capable. The sweet kindness of heart and warm devotion to cause and kindred which characterize the Italian and Irish races lay in the softness of his dark eyes, the velvet smoothness of his voice, but were quite absent from his nature. This Clara Thayer did not know; and, had she known, it is more than probable that she would not have cared. For the first time in her life she was in the grip of a perfectly irrational fascination, an infatuation which drove her as a whirlwind might drive wheat. The infatuation ended, moreover, only when her life did.

This was, perhaps, a natural ending to Clara Thayer's career. It was natural, too, that people should refer to her as that poor girl who made "such a sensible first match" and "such an idiotic second one." As a matter of fact it would be difficult to determine which of Clara's two marriages was the more idiotic. Her first was for money, her second, for love. Her first supplied her with good food, pretty clothes and unlimited boredom. Her second gave her sharp rapture and equally poignant pain. Possibly, if she had remained unmarried she might have encountered worse things than any of these. Of the three wishes which the bad fairy, Life, gives the average woman it is difficult to say which is the least fraught with unhappiness.

"Woman in a bitter world must do the best she can." Clara Brooks did the best she could and bad was the best.

However she died at forty-five, and many women live to be old.

CHAPTER V
"BLIND FOOLS OF FATE"

"Blind fools of fate and slaves of circumstance,
Life is a fiddler and we all must dance."
—*Robert Service.*

When Clara Thayer gave birth to a daughter she was, as has been before stated, disappointed. When that daughter developed the appearance and characteristics of its father Clara began to dislike it. In vain she reasoned with herself, in vain upbraided herself, secretly and severely, in vain called herself "an unnatural mother." The sad fact remained that she did not care for the child. It had no pretty ways, no graceful tricks; its eyes were dull, its skin was pale, its hair ordinary. If it had resembled her she would have loved it; if it had resembled her mother, her father, anyone for whom she cared, she would have idolized it. It resembled no one, however, but her husband, and, although when Clara had married Lowden Thayer she had been supremely indifferent to him, that indifference had, unfortunately, deepened into a positively appalling dislike. Not dislike for his character which she respected; not dislike for his attitude toward her which left nothing to be desired; no, dislike for the man, himself, dislike for his personality, his manners, his way of entering a room, his way of brushing his hair, his way of walking, talking, breathing.

It is easy here for the reader to throw down this veracious account of a real woman with the single comment that she was unreasonable and ungrateful. It is true that she was unreasonable but not that she was ungrateful. She knew all that she owed to her husband, she sometimes hated herself for her lack of feeling, and she strove earnestly to hide her dislike and to do her duty in a way befitting a wife and mother. It was a bitter addition to what seemed to her an already difficult life when the child, to whose advent she had looked with so much hope and longing, turned out the counterpart of her husband. Instead of a distraction it was a perpetual reminder of the galling chain; instead of a delight it represented merely another disagreeable duty.

Clara was generally considered a model wife and mother; every domestic obligation was scrupulously performed, every connubial and matronly demand upon her time, health and patience, uncomplainingly complied with. When Mr. Thayer died, however, four years after their marriage, Clara felt only an unspeakable relief; and when, nine years later, Mr. Thayer's brother offered to adopt Lynn, on condition that her mother gave her up, entirely, Clara felt only that a burden had been lifted from her shoulders.

She had one child by her second husband after she had been married to him five years, and that child was a boy who combined his father's picturesque, foreign beauty with his mother's refinement and grace. To him, she was an adoring mother; he was second in her heart only to Guido Allardi. Just as Lynn had been the image of the man whom Clara had disliked, so Lionel was the image of the man whom she worshipped. There was no wish or choice in the matter; she always felt sorry that she could not care for Lynn, and she sometimes wished, in moments of bitterness, that Lionel did not resemble his father so closely. It was a rare retribution of Fate, this! the unloved child of the unloved father who was all that a mother could wish and the idolized child of the idolized father who inherited from him every trait that could break a mother's heart. If Lowden Thayer could have looked into the future he would have been amply revenged. It is improbable, however, that he wanted revenge; he wanted his wife's love and, failing that, he wanted rest. He never had the first but we may reasonably hope that he had the latter.

"Love's eyes are very blind," but they are never so blind as not to perceive dislike on the part of the loved object, however conscientiously that dislike may be hidden. Lowden Thayer was a just man; he saw that his wife did her best and he, on his part, did his best, hid his sorrow manfully, and, when he died, willed Clara all his property, unhampered by any galling restrictions.

The little daughter whom he left behind developed in a rather interesting fashion.

The widely diverse natures of Lowden Thayer and his wife mingled oddly in her. She had her father's face but her mother's pliant, graceful figure and movements. She inherited from her father a useful brain, capable of assimilating considerable knowledge and of reasoning accurately and carefully; but she had her mother's brilliancy and lively wit. She had her father's industry, business ability, and sense of justice, and her mother's love of popularity and social gayety. From both she inherited one thing in overwhelming measure; the capacity for any amount of silent, tenacious affection which no ill-treatment could shake, no disillusionment alter. Another thing, too, she had from both; the ability to suffer in silence, keeping a cool and careless front to the world and hiding a bleeding heart and a broken spirit behind a smiling face and manner. Lynn was thus, in

many ways, not so unlike her mother as that mother supposed.

At the time when Lynn was adopted by her uncle Horace she was twelve years of age. The next seven years were very busy ones. Child though she was, she felt keenly the fact that her uncle had taken her into his home in fulfilment of a sense of duty, rather than from motives of affection. She determined that she would be indebted to him for nothing more than was absolutely necessary. In pursuance of this idea she begged to be allowed to train for a teacher and, on graduating, insisted on taking a position which offered itself. Her uncle made little objection; he cherished the common masculine delusion that women who live at home have nothing to do with their time and he thought it rather a good idea that some of this time should be occupied. The idea of his niece being a public school teacher did not exactly appeal to his sense of the fitness of things; but, after all, since the girl was bent on it, "let her do as she likes" was his ultimatum. Therefore Lynn did as she liked; and events which shortly afterwards transpired made her think with horror of the fact that, had she followed her aunt's wishes, she would have been without any money that she could call her own.

It was when she was nineteen that she received a letter in an unknown handwriting. Its contents were brief and pregnant. Her mother was dying; would Lynn visit her in New York before she died? as there was much that she had to say. The letter ended with an injunction to hide the matter from her uncle and aunt, who would never allow her to travel alone, and would insist on accompanying her, which her mother did not wish.

It would be difficult to describe the effect which this letter had upon Lynn. She had always known that she held no place in her mother's heart, and that knowledge was a settled grief, not an active sorrow. The letter gave her a dull pain, almost like the pain which one would experience, could the corpse of a dead friend whom one had mourned, then almost though not quite forgotten, suddenly come to life and demand recognition.

Lynn had held no communication with her mother since she had lived with her uncle in Montreal. To her literal and very punctilious mind the fact that this correspondence was debarred as a condition of adoption rendered it out of the question. Besides, it must be remembered that there had been no tender, anguished parting of mother and child; Clara had, as always, behaved prettily and politely, had kissed the plain little face, distorted with difficult feeling, and had inwardly congratulated herself that this child of Lowden Thayer had inherited his silent, unemotional nature. Otherwise she would have felt more hesitation about sending her among strangers. As it was—the child was a good child, who could be depended upon to give little or no trouble to her guardians, and she had so little feeling that one place was likely to be much like another place to her. True, Clara reflected with a slight qualm, true, the child was devoted to her little

brother; but children soon forget. It would be a criminal sentimentality and one for which the girl would have a right to reproach her in the future, did she neglect this excellent chance of having her provided for. So she kissed her once again, trying to smile at her with affection and kindness, told her that she must not altogether forget her mother and her little brother, though it was not likely that she would see them again for a little while; and watched the train steaming out of the crowded station with mingled feelings of pity, relief, self-congratulation, and some faint stirring of sorrow that she could not feel more spontaneous affection for her own child. Her own child!—that recalled Lionel to her mind and her eyes brightened and gleamed. How beautiful he was! how dear! how sweet that Fate should give her this one lovely thing to offset her disappointment in the other direction! And how delightful that the six hundred which Horace Thayer had allowed her for the future should be tied up so tightly that only she could have access to it. Little Lionel need not lack for everything while she had that to fall back upon.

It may be asked if no thought of her dead husband, no perception of the difference between him and Allardi ever caused her to draw painful contrasts and inferences. Yes, these thoughts, these comparisons did occur to her sorrowfully enough at times; she frequently bewailed the ugly Fate which made the faithful dead abhorrent, the unprincipled and worthless living dear to her. But facts are facts. The dead was abhorrent, the living *was* dear. So with her children. Despite the fact that, although at the time of which we write, Lionel was a baby, he already displayed traits which made her uneasy; despite the fact that Lynn had been almost pathetically "good" from babyhood, humbly devoted to her mother, utterly subservient to every whim of her baby brother; despite these facts, Clara had for Lynn, at best, a sort of affectionate tolerance, while for Lionel she had an overpowering love.

Do not, dear reader, wholly bury poor Clara under the weight of your virtuous indignation. She had an unfortunate disposition, that was all. The worthless attracted, the worthy annoyed her. She was no more to blame than the child who seizes some pernicious sweetmeat and refuses even to look at the nourishing and expensive meal which awaits his pleasure.

This much, at least, it is desired that the reader keep clearly in mind when judging Clara Allardi. Both in her "mariage de convenance" and in her "love-match" she made the best of what she had; tried not to visit upon Lowden Thayer the dislike which marriage with him had awakened; endeavoured to bear patiently with Guido Allardi's vagaries and steadily refused to leave him even when all her own money had been squandered and when he was incapable of making enough to support her, comfortably. This last, though, can scarcely be attributed to her for righteousness. The real reason that she stayed with the Italian was be-

cause she could not leave him; she was like a parasite, drawing her very breath through him and unable to exist away from him.

Poor Clara Allardi! "Blind fool of fate and slave of circumstance!" When her unloved daughter responded to the letter which had caused her such mingled pain and joy, she found the former favourite of fortune living—or, rather, dying—in the modern equivalent of the historic garret, a squalid tenement in an unfashionable and ragged quarter of the great city of New York. Her mother's husband, Lynn did not see; the strain of attending to his sick wife had proved unsupportable and, after a short time, he had taken his departure, leaving no address. Lynn hoped that he would not return until she had left New York; she felt, seeing her mother and remembering what that mother had been in the past, that she could scarcely have borne the burden of his presence. Her fears, however, were unnecessary; Clara Allardi had been dead several days before that husband returned and his absence had troubled Lynn more than his presence could have done; for it was from him that she was obliged to ask the boon which crippled her future yet filled her life for many years.

This, however, is anticipating. We must return to the time when Lynn took up her abode in her mother's "home" once more and did what she could for the comfort of that mother. She had complied with Clara's request in so far that she had told her guardians of her destination; she had gone to the principal of the school where she taught and had asked for leave of absence, offering to pay a substitute; then had packed a valise and left a note for her aunt, explaining her mother's condition and begging that her uncle would not follow or bother about her. This was merely a figure of speech on Lynn's part; Horace Thayer was a man who never bothered about anything in the universe but himself. Lynn realized, however, that her aunt, who had a real affection for her, ought to know her whereabouts and the object of her journey; though, in the face of her mother's strangely insistent entreaties, she was strongly tempted to use a long-standing New York invitation from a school friend, as a pretext.

She found her mother delirious and very weak. She talked incoherently, but recognized Lynn and greeted her with something like eagerness, in the way that one would greet a useful friend rather than in the way that one would greet a child whom one had not seen for many years. Lynn, however, had steeled herself to bear what she had anticipated would not be an especially joyous reunion and took stoically whatever arrows the joyous fates chose to drive in her direction.

Must the truth be confessed? It was not the thought of seeing her mother before she died that had formed Lynn's chief object in hastening to New York. While she would, in any case, have used every effort to further her mother's dying wish, it must be confessed that there was little more than a bitter, dull grief in the prospect of seeing the latter, again. But there was another, darling prospect. The

child! the little boy who had been three when she left him, would be ten, now. Oh, to see him, again! the one being who had always clung to her, loved her, satisfied her. The dear, unutterably dear little mortal whose arrival into the world had changed the face of life for her. How had she lived without him all these years? she wondered; was he as beautiful as ever, as full of life and sweetness? and—had he come to resemble his father as much as he had promised to do? The thought depressed her for a moment; she remembered how, as a child, it had infuriated her to hear people remark upon the wonderful likeness between Allardi and his infant son. Then her brow cleared. He was really more like her mother than his father, she insisted to herself; as he had her high-bred clearness of outline, so he would inherit her delicate refinement, her ineradicable fastidiousness of mind. She lost herself in hopeful musing, almost forgetting in the joy of seeing her little brother once more that her mother's grave would probably be dug before she returned again to Montreal.

CHAPTER VI

"LIFE AT ITS END"

The April morning broke softly, implacably chill. There was a hint of cruelty in the frolicsome spring breeze that danced through the half-opened window, a hint of sorrow in the few faint tremulous notes of "half-awakened birds," preparing once more to face the strange world of which they knew so little. There was something ominous in the softness of the spring air, something that chilled one's blood with a faint terror.

Over the dreary tenements and horrible, rearing buildings of New York broke the pitiless day. The lovely rose of dawn softened all that was bare and bleak and gave it a semblance of tenderness and repose.

There was silence in the room where Death lay waiting. The body of Clara Allardi lay stretched upon a bed in slumber, her wasted hand, blue-veined, marble-white, plucking mechanically at the quilt, her restless voice muttering vaguely of things that had long since passed away; lips that had laughed, pulses that had leaped, hearts that had broken, long, long ago. Death, itself, might have laughed to hear her; but her daughter did not laugh.

Clara's face was blue-veined now and hollow-eyed, but, even so, was lovely; delicately, uselessly lovely, with the flawless pulchritude of a marble

statue, the sickening, unearthly hue of ivory. Clara Allardi had been very beautiful in her day, had had her share of the kingdoms of this world and the glories of them; she lay dying in a New York tenement, unloved, uncared-for, an old woman at the age of forty-five.

Nature "red of tooth and claw" is sometimes more horrible in tender mood than in fierce; this riot of delicate colour and tremulous song in the face of grisly Death seemed to Lynn Thayer insulting and indecorous. The tragedy of the breaking day and of the ebbing life gnawed at her heart. She sat silent, watching the dying with hungry eyes that held no trace of personal grief, only a dumb heart-craving for something she had never known.

In the farther end of the room lay a child who slept peacefully, his scarlet lips half-parted in a smile, his delicate arms thrust outside the bed-clothes and half-bared. The long black lashes which lay on the glowing dusk of his cheek; the thickness of the clustering curls which shaded his low brow; the almost insolent regularity of his childish features: all proclaimed him to be Guido Allardi's son. He was an ideal and faithful representative of the old, Italian race to which his father belonged; before the family, ruined and disgraced, had sought refuge in America, many such a face had been seen in the family portrait gallery. Probably none quite so beautiful; beauty such as this child's is rare and the possessors of it are seldom quite human. Perhaps this fact may have given rise to the old Greek myths of the gods descending in human shape and proceeding to the performance of most ungodlike actions.

Lynn's thoughts wandered sometimes to the cot where the boy lay, looking as much out of place in the sordid setting which the room afforded as some strange tropical plant. As she thought of him, her face insensibly cleared. The baby brother of her childhood days had proved a fulfilled delight. As beautiful as in infancy and with the same caressing, clinging ways which had made him so dear to her then, he had justified, to her, her loving remembrance of him. She cherished a hidden thought of which she was half ashamed yet which held a very real sweetness; namely, that, in spite of the long years of separation, the boy loved and clung to her and, as of old, seemed to prefer her society to that of his mother. She failed to realize that the stock of bonbons and toys with which she had provided herself had induced the affection which the child showed so freely; she did not know that he would have left his dying mother with equal alacrity for anyone who would have fed him with chocolates. So little do we comprehend what is passing in the minds of those most near and dear to us; even in the crystal mind of a child there are depths which it is just as well not to probe too deeply.

In the bare and comfortless room where these three were congregated Life and Death were present and one more—Judgment. Judgment, the dread avenger who dogs the steps of Sin. Judgment which, after the fashion of Judgment, would

fall most heavily on the innocent head, most cruelly on the undeserving. Could Lynn have looked into the future and seen the awful harvest of corruption which the sleeping child would reap it may be wondered whether she would not have killed him as he lay, out of sheer pity.

Ah, the tragedy of Life! Life that takes from us one by one all the glittering baubles with which she has amused our childish hours—the rose-hued hopes, the crimson loves, the golden ambitions—and gives us in their place—what? The dying moaned as though these thoughts had found an echo in her heart; then lay still, looking straight in front of her with eyes which, though glazed and uncertain, held a certain intelligence.

"Mother—are you better? do you understand me?" asked Lynn very softly, bending over the bed.

Clara Allardi turned her head slightly; her lips moved.

"There was something, something you wanted to say," cried Lynn, desperately. "If you could only tell me now; it will not take long, will it?"

Her mother's face brightened into life; an anxious gleam shone in her eyes which now held no uncertainty, but were the homes of an insistent purpose, a keen desire. She struggled a moment, then spoke, faintly.

"Your brother?"—

"Yes. Yes."

"Not really—only your half-brother—but you always cared just as much"—

"More. Oh, mother, a thousand times more. Don't waste time in saying all this. Is it something you want me to do for Lionel? Surely you know that anything I could do would be all too little—tell me, just tell me what it is. I swear to do it, whatever it may be."

"See to him. His father—you know"—

"I know."

"—Doesn't understand children—the little fellow may be hungry, cold"—Clara Allardi's voice broke into a pitiful quaver which shook Lynn's composure, terribly.

"Mother," she said, growing white and speaking distinctly, "you are wasting time and you may not have much more time. You know—you must know—that, while I live, Liol shall want for nothing that I can give him. He can never be cold—or hungry—or friendless—or—loveless—while I live. You must know all that. I have my teacher's salary; if that is not enough I will get money in some other way; I have some saved, I have some jewelry—oh, don't talk of anything so trivial, so absurd, as the idea of Lionel ever wanting for anything which I can give him. You understand all that, don't you, mother?"

Her mother's face cleared, then clouded.

"You may marry—change?" she muttered, looking wistfully at her daughter.

"Never!" said Lynn, choking. "You don't understand me, mother. I could never think of marriage while Liol was dependent on me; and, as for change—if that is all, you can die happy."

"Swear," said her mother, faintly.

Lynn hesitated. "I don't like swearing," she returned, reluctantly, "but, if it will make you any happier—I swear by everything in heaven and earth—by God Almighty—by the memory of my father—that I will do exactly as I have said. I will look after Lionel always, always, no matter what it costs me. *Now* are you satisfied?"

"You won't be hard on him—he is," she winced, "he is—Guido's child. We don't—don't always understand foreigners—women don't always—understand—men. You will remember?—you will think of his heritage—and be merciful? I have always had to be." Her voice dropped and broke in a dry sob.

"If he develops into what your husband is," returned Lynn, quietly, "it will make no difference. You don't understand me, mother. Just as you never left the other one, because you couldn't, because you wouldn't have cared to live away from him; so I—I couldn't desert Liol. I have always loved him; how dearly you have never even guessed. I shall always love him and—and when he leaves his father and goes to a good school and knows only good people"—

"It's in his blood," said his mother, faintly. "Already—already it shows. You—you must make—allowances. Another thing!" she attempted to raise herself in the bed and her eyes shone with a feverish glitter, "another thing, Lynn! No one must know." Her voice grew firmer, her hand more steady. "You remember the conditions—when your uncle"—

"I remember them well. But, dear mother, you don't think Uncle Horace would hold me to them—now?"

"Horace is hard—a hard man. When—if—Liol did take after his father—they would never let you see him—or know him. No. If I am to die in peace you must swear never to tell a living soul that he is your brother. If anyone at all knew—your uncle might find out—oh, Lynn, promise?"

Lynn spoke, slowly. "You have not thought, mother. This secrecy will lead to all sorts of complications. Uncle Horace is a hard man, but he is just. He will grumble and think me a fool, but he can't refuse his consent. At present—for a while—it won't matter, not telling anyone about Liol; but later on—oh, mother, don't ask me to promise that. Let me use my discretion about it, won't you?"

Clara Allardi half raised herself in bed; her eyes shone with unnatural lustre, her delicate features thickened with a sort of fury and fever of determination.

"You refuse?" she said with terrible distinctness. "You refuse? Then—I curse you. *I curse you.* You—you're taking your revenge now when I'm dying and helpless for the years that I've put him before you. I curse you—why can't you

let me die in peace? You'll tell—you'll tell the Thayers; they'll make you give him up or turn you out of doors. How will you look after him then on a miserable pittance that depends upon your strength anyway and may fail at any moment? Ah, you're your father in the flesh,"—she spoke, slowly and with a concentrated bitterness that appalled Lynn. "Good—hard—hateful! Why did I ever bring you into the world?"

"That I might look after the child whom you love, I suppose," returned Lynn with equal bitterness. "Have no fear, mother. You needn't curse me. If nothing else will make you happy, I'll swear. You know, of course, that you're making me deceive and lie to my guardians and all the rest of the world and that you may land me in hopeless confusion and trouble; but if you think that will benefit Liol and minimize the chances of his being deprived of anything or annoyed in any way—why, of course, there is nothing more to be said—is there?"

But Clara Allardi had sunk back with a look of satisfaction and relief at hearing her daughter's bitter promise to take the oath required, and it is doubtful whether she even heard the rest.

"Swear, then!" was all she answered.

Lynn hesitated; looked imploringly at her mother; then slowly and reluctantly repeated her former oath. "By God Almighty—by the memory of my father—by all I hold sacred in heaven and earth—mother, mother, mother!"

Clara's fair face had turned the colour of parchment; no breath of life seemed issuing from her blue lips. Struck by a deadly fear, a still more poignant longing, Lynn Thayer bent over her mother's death-bed, yearning with an intensity which surprised herself, for some word of kindness, of recognition, ere the poor dust turned to dust. It almost seemed as though her prayer had been answered, for Clara opened her eyes and looked at Lynn, a lovely light of longing in them. Her lips moved faintly.

"My child!"—the whisper came softly—"my boy—my only child!"

She did not realize, of course, what she was saying. Lynn understood that. She rose from her knees, with lips firmly set. Her face was a little white.

"You want to see him again," she said, in tones which sounded clearly. "I will bring him to you."

Mrs. Allardi's face brightened. Lynn had divined her inmost thought. She yearned for the child. She hungered to die, holding him. But Fate, implacable as iron to the profitless wishes of poor foolish, failing, mortal things, decreed otherwise. A change on the dying face, an ominous rattle and choking, arrested Lynn's footsteps and brought her hurriedly back.

Clara Allardi gasped a little, a very little, then lay quiet. Lynn stood and watched her, looking pinched and plain in the trying light of early dawn. The other woman lay with eyes that stared a little. Presently Lynn realized that she

was dead; it did not come as a shock, only as an added desolation. She leaned forward and touched the cold cheek, timidly.

"Mother!" she said in a low voice, "Mother!"

There was a brief and bitter silence. Then Lynn took the cold head in her arms and held it for a moment while her tears fell fast and bitterly over it.

"She was my mother," she said, weeping, "she—was—my mother!" There was no complaint in her tones, only a dull pain. Her face held an unconscious desolation as she laid the fair head back on the pillow and settled it, decently. She shivered a little as one soft, scented tress fell against her hand. She had never touched her mother's hair in life and, oddly enough, this trifling remembrance cut her to the naked soul. She gasped and looked away, choking down her rising sobs with a species of horror and disgust. Life had taught her self-control, and she disliked noise in the presence of the dead.

Presently she rose and moved softly to the cot where the boy lay sleeping. She looked at him in silence. He stirred in his sleep and smiled a little. Her sallow face flamed into sudden life and beauty as she stood, watching him, an adoring smile curving her thin lips. She had forgotten the other silent inmate of the room who lay, smiling too, the dead eyes which her daughter had forgotten to close, gazing in front of her as though she saw nothing to fear in the eternity upon which she had entered.

Suddenly there was a burst of radiance, a riot of colour and fragrance and song. The chill, pink light of sunrise streamed through the window and lay on the dead face, making it very lovely. A delicate rose was reflected in the icy cheek, a brilliant gold in the faded hair. Lynn, who had turned, startled by the sudden light, was struck by her mother's beauty. Despite anxiety, illness, sorrow, Clara Allardi made rather an exquisite corpse; and, as her plain daughter sat watching her in the trying light of early dawn, she reflected with a smile that held no mirth that even in death it was well to have regular features and abundance of soft hair. Then her face changed and softened. She moved reverently to the side of the bed, veiled the staring eyes, crossed the thin hands. Then she knelt and prayed; while far, immeasurably far below, the slow wail of the sick child, the low moan of the hungry animal, smote on the deaf ear, the cold heart, of great New York.

CHAPTER VII
A SHORT REPENTANCE

”Indeed, indeed, Repentance oft before
I swore—but was I sober when I swore?
And then and then came Spring and rose-in-hand
My thread-bare Penitence apieces tore.”
—*The Rubaiyat.*

Nine years had passed since the events related in the last chapter. Lynn Thayer had developed from a girl of nineteen into a woman of twenty-eight. She had lived quietly in Montreal, never relinquishing her position in the school, though, as the years went by, her aunt had more than once begged her to remain at home and lead the life of an ordinary young woman of her class.

As has before been said, Lynn occupied a rather exceptional position in Montreal. The average girl who teaches in the public schools makes up her mind, sooner or later, to be a teacher, only. Her position is not considered in the light of a disgrace, but, on the other hand, she occupies a slightly lower grade than does the girl who remains at home. The latter, provided she has the social connections and the time, may go into any society she pleases. She may be unable to return any hospitality except in a very simple fashion, but she may still figure as a ”society girl” and receive and accept invitations in the most exclusive houses.

Probably no other girl but Lynn, however, was ever successful in combining the duties of a public school teacher and of a society girl. Both her father and mother had been so well-to-do, so well-known in Montreal; both had had so many rich friends, so many influential connections, that their daughter was of necessity a figure of interest. Then, too, she was connected with the nobility; and, what was more important, her aunts on both sides of the family, who lived in Montreal, received and returned visits from the most exclusive Butchers, Bakers and Candlestick-Makers, and were generally accepted as ”fixtures” in society. Therefore Lynn had invitations of all kinds, not only from people of gentle breeding, aristocratic birth and good character, but also from that far more important section of ”society” who lived in big houses and got their clothes from Paquin. She never ”came out,” much to her aunt’s grief; but she ”went out,” which was more to the point and which many girls who ”come out” never succeed in doing. She was so popular, so generally liked, that her obstinate determination to spend her days in teaching was both admired and extolled.

Meanwhile, what of her brother?

On Mrs. Allardi’s death Lynn had secured from his father, who appeared supremely indifferent to the child and to his fate, a promise that she was to have full control of him, on condition of paying for his board and education. Lynn, after considerable thought, made arrangements for him at a good but unfashion-

able school in the country, as far as possible removed from his father. She was struck by the attitude of father and son to one another. Allardi seemed to regard his small son as an amusing kind of dog, to be patted on the head if he were in a good humour, kicked out of the way if he were not; he was proud of him, in a way, devoted to him; yet, apparently, never thought anything of his present wants or of his future needs. He was quite capable of leaving the child alone for days while he sought distraction elsewhere, and of loading him with bonbons and caresses on his return.

He felt that if this queer, silent step-daughter of his chose to supplement a small allowance which Mr. Thayer had promised to make the boy, he would be very foolish to stand in the way. He could make any promise she chose to exact and break it with alacrity as soon as the keeping of it became inconvenient. Therefore the readiness with which he promised to see practically nothing of the boy in the future sprang really from a defective sense of the value of a promise, rather than from the total heartlessness with which Lynn credited him. He was really fond of Lionel—in his way; and fully intended to see all that he wished of him, whenever necessary.

So the child went to school and Lynn returned to Montreal and worked steadily for the extra sums which were needed for Lionel's maintenance. The next few years were comparatively restful and pleasant ones. The reports which she received of Lionel were not good, yet he seemed to be progressing fairly well, and Lynn, remembering her mother's dying words, tried not to expect too much in the beginning. When Lionel was fourteen, however, he ran away and joined his father in New York.

Lynn did not even know his whereabouts and had no way of discovering them. The boy did not assuage her anxiety by writing, feeling that his hiding-place might be ascertained if he gave any clue to it and that he would then be compelled to return. However, Allardi wrote to Lynn after a time, telling her that the boy was with him and asking that she would not withdraw her help as Lionel already needed much that he could not give him.

Lynn exhausted entreaties, reproofs, and even threats. Allardi was the boy's natural guardian in the eyes of the law; his will was absolute and he refused to send the boy from him unless well paid for so doing. This was out of the question. Lynn had already earned the reputation of a miser for the scantiness and plainness of the wardrobe which Mrs. Thayer felt herself constantly obliged to supplement. Naturally Mrs. Thayer could not see why a girl with fifty dollars a month to spend on herself alone—as she supposed—should lack for anything in reason.

Here the inconvenience and absurdity of the oath which Mrs. Allardi had made Lynn swear began to show itself most unpleasantly. The truth was so sim-

ple, the secrecy made the whole matter so difficult. Lynn had dreaded inquiries anent the boy when she first returned after her mother's death, but none had been forthcoming. Mr. Thayer had expected that Lynn would ask him to have an eye to the boy and see that the small allowance he had promised to make him was fairly spent; when nothing was said on the matter he assumed that Lynn disliked the child as she did the father and preferred never to think or speak of them, now that the one link between them and her was broken. Mr. Thayer was glad to forget the existence of his sister-in-law's other child. He had never even seen the father or the son; he had been intensely indignant at the second marriage contracted while Clara was visiting friends in the States; and, subsequent events having justified his indignation, he had sedulously avoided meeting any of the people concerned. His offer to adopt Lynn had been made by letter; he had sent money for the journey when that offer was accepted, and settled the amount agreed upon his sister-in-law; and had then endeavoured to drive the whole affair from his mind. However, upon Lynn's return from New York, he did make some gruff inquiries as to the child's whereabouts; and, on her replying that the boy was at a cheap but highly respectable boarding-school in the country, he had, with a feeling of relief, dismissed the whole matter from his mind, thinking that "that Italian blackguard" had some sense of decency after all.

There seemed little that Lynn could do, now that Lionel had taken matters into his own hands and openly declared his intention of remaining with his father. Of course the rational thing was to break her promise and take her relatives into her confidence. Only the most scrupulous moralist could hold her bound by an oath which her mother, could she have looked into the future, would have surely wished her to break. Ah, if only logic ruled life, how simple life would be. Unfortunately it does not.

Lynn had inherited from both father and mother an overstrained sense of honour and, though she had done her best to refrain from making the unfair and ridiculous promise, the possibility of breaking it when made never occurred to her.

The Roman Catholic system of confession has its advantages after all. Had Lynn gone to any confessional and asked for permission to break her oath, and absolution for the sin of so doing, what sensible man, priest or layman, would have refused to sanction such a procedure? Lynn, under the circumstances, had no confidant, no adviser, no one to show her the needlessness of her various sacrifices.

Besides, it is to be feared that Lynn's sense of honour was so deeply ingrained that it could not, under any conditions, have yielded to the dictates of common sense. She would probably have done, in any circumstances, just what she proceeded to do; kept the foolish oath in its entirety, continued to help the

ungrateful boy, in spite of the fact that he, in defiance of her expressed wishes, continued to live in New York with his father, and generally have conducted herself as over-fond and irrational women do, under such circumstances.

When Lionel was sixteen, however, his father died of consumption in a tragic and horrible manner; and Lionel, temporarily sobered by the occurrence, suddenly "turned over a new leaf," as he expressed it, and wrote Lynn to that effect, declaring his intention of taking up literary work and "making his name in it." Although his manner of supporting himself did not seem very practicable to his sister, she hailed with joy this indication that her work and care had at last borne fruit.

And, for a short time, Lionel was a source of unmitigated joy and pride to her. There are but a few poets in the world and he was one of them. His work earned him instant recognition among a certain set and, although his earnings were paltry, he, at all events, did earn something and bade fair to earn more. All literary workers know how frequently a certain amount of fame may be gained with very small pecuniary success to back it.

Then Lionel decided to live in Montreal. He was ill; New York did not agree with him; he wanted new experiences and realized that Lynn could give him one thing that he had never known—the society of rich and fashionable people; and, more important than all, he knew well that he could wheedle every penny of her earnings from her, provided he lived in the same town. The boy was a degenerate, totally without gentle feeling of any kind, his only approach to it being a sort of sympathetic and artistic understanding of other people's emotions. His sister was, to him, merely a cow to be milked dry. He was, to his sister, a demi-god to be sacrificed to; she laid before him in the dust the burnt ashes of her heart and life—and received the fitting and inevitable reward of such folly.

By reason of the oath sworn by Lynn and also because Lionel had won fame under the name of Leo Ricossia, this was the name by which he chose to be known in Montreal. As Leo Ricossia he was received with open arms. He had secured letters of introduction to certain influential Montrealers and soon contrived to be formally presented to his sister at the home of one of these. His literary fame had preceded him, and this, in conjunction with his extraordinary beauty, his extreme youth, and the fact that he, already, lay under sentence of death made him, for the time being, "the rage." No social gathering was complete without him; all the debutantes cut out his poems, pasted them in albums, and entreated his signature on the opening page; all the older women of fashion petted, indulged and ran after him.

It is extraordinary how rapidly and completely a certain person may become "the rage" and still more extraordinary how rapidly and completely this person may sink out of sight and be practically forgotten in the space of a

few months. For about a year Ricossia's popularity was at fever height; then—murmurs of disapprobation, shruggings of shoulders, a few hints here, a few direct words of condemnation there—and, by the end of another year, Society knew Ricossia no more. He had overstepped the limit of indulgence; much is excused to a young and handsome man with charming manners and lung disease; but not everything. In Ricossia's case, unfortunately, there was everything to excuse and people finally and positively refused to excuse it. Ricossia, who had tired very quickly of comparative respectability, hastened the climax with a certain gay recklessness, and abandoned himself with entire satisfaction to all that he had vowed to relinquish when he came to Montreal. Taking up his abode in the disreputable old studio building before-mentioned, he proceeded to follow very literally the words of the Episcopal prayer-book, doing everything that he ought not to do, leaving undone all that he ought to do.

Now, it will be supposed, Lynn's patience failed, utterly. Now, at last she abandoned the wretched boy who was bound to her only by blood and who had voluntarily relinquished every claim on her regard? Ah, no. Again let us repeat, if only logic ruled life, how simple life would be. As logic does not rule life, Lynn continued to support her half-brother, denying herself everything that she could go without, refusing all invitations that entailed expensive clothes, immolating herself on the altar of self-sacrifice with most-admired indiscretion. Nor was this all. As it was clearly impossible that the disgraced and ostracized Ricossia should visit her in the respectable home of her irreproachable relatives; as it was equally impossible that she should go by daylight to the somewhat disreputable quarter of the town where he lived; as everything within her denied the possibility of leaving him to die in poverty, illness and loneliness; for all these reasons and for fifty others equally excellent, Lynn hit on the brilliant plan of visiting him by stealth, Nicodemus-fashion, of going ostensibly to dine with some friend or friends, and of leaving early and driving to the Chatham in order to see for herself whether the worthless life was still extant and whether the cold heart craved anything that she could give it. A fool? Oh yes, a very great and undoubted fool.

Unfortunately the vast mass of humanity is composed of fools, and the people apparently free from any trace of such folly are not just the people whom we most admire and love. Casabianca, standing flame-encircled on the sinking ship; Joan of Arc leading a handful of peasants against the flower of the English army; Charlotte Corday giving her life on the guillotine for the pleasure of making a martyr of an inhuman hound; all these and all the other divine fools of history make a curious appeal to humanity. Why? That is difficult to answer. Perhaps because, deep in our hearts, we know ourselves to be fools and are not, in moments of depression, quite convinced that we are even divine fools.

Be that as it may, Lynn Thayer qualified herself, as will be admitted, for a

high place in the picture gallery of fools; risking her reputation, beggaring her life, breaking her heart, all for the sake of a boy who had done nothing from childhood but grieve, torment and disappoint her. Ah, but he had done a little more than this. He had filled her life with his image; he had afforded her an object on which to squander the treasures of her mind and heart. And what more does the average fool want, whether she be an historical, or, as in this case, an ultra-modern fool?

Ricossia had hit on a way by which Lynn was enabled to supplement her teacher's salary and provide for him more comfortably. Struck by the humour and style of a little sketch which she had written for his amusement, he made a few alterations in it and sent it to an editor with whom he was personally acquainted, under his own name. It was accepted and paid for; and, from that time on, Ricossia was known for his pungent and witty society skits. Lynn was only too grateful for the addition to her much-strained purse and delighted that her brother was pleased to approve of her work. Had it not been for this new method of earning, she would have found it increasingly difficult to account for the way in which her money went, bringing her no apparent return.

In her spare moments, therefore, she wrote, busily, and, moreover, assumed the duty of amanuensis to her brother, who seemed more and more indifferent, as his health declined and his energy waned, as to the disposal of his brain-wares. Provided he could carouse all night and sleep all day he seemed content; only varying this routine by complaints if Lynn either came at inopportune times or failed to come when she might have been of use.

He absolutely refused all medical aid and scoffed at the idea of going to a sanitarium. He knew that he must die and he wanted to die, happy. And, if Lynn had but known it, this, under the circumstances, was about the greatest kindness he could have done society in general and his sister in particular.

CHAPTER VIII

"PUNCHINELLO"

"He laughed ... as gaily,
Dancing, joking every night,
'He's the maddest, merriest fellow,'
Cried the people with delight.

Bravo, bravo! Punchinello!
Bravo, Punchinello!"
—Old Song.

Mr. Zangwell, in his clever "Serio-Comic Governess," has shown us a young lady leading two very different lives at one and the same time. In the day-time she is a highly respectable and decorous governess, at night, a music-hall artiste. In both lines she is a success.

Now this success is probably owing to the fact that this particular young lady is gratifying her curiosity and her desire to lead a conventional existence at one and the same time. She is, in short, doing that which she wishes to do.

There are many such "serio-comic governesses" in real life. Perhaps you, who read, may be one; perhaps, unknown to you, the dear friend from whom you have no secrets and who, you fondly believe, has none from you, may have a personality which you have never even guessed at.

In the case of our "serio-comic governess," however, we must draw a distinction. Lynn Thayer liked neither of her lives, which clashed horribly both with one another and with her sense of right. Since she saw no way in which she could avoid it, however, she continued to lead them to the best of her ability, sustained, if not comforted, by the thought that one of them was bound to terminate with the death of the one being whom she most loved.

We have seen our "serio-comic governess" in one role; now we see her in another. We have seen Punchinello with the mask off and the grin absent; now we see him as he appears daily in the theatre of life.

Lynn had returned from the school where she taught and sat in her aunt's sitting-room, engaged on a shirtwaist and in conversation. If we listen we shall be able to form a fair idea of the progress of the conversation, if not of that of the shirtwaist. Mrs. Thayer was employed in embroidering a collar and impressed the casual observer as doing the exact thing for which Nature had fitted her. She was one of those pretty, faded, querulous women with worthy hearts but limited intellects of whom one almost instinctively speaks as "poor thing"; why, it is hard to say, except that something in their appearance calls forth the expression. No one ever called Lynn Thayer "poor thing," nor would, whatever griefs or difficulties she might labour under.

Mrs. Thayer was speaking.

"Now, Lynn, *why* is he not coming here, to-night?"

"For one thing, because I don't want him; and, for another, because he is changing his hotel. You know he is staying at the 'Hastings' while his house is in the hands of the painters."

"And he is moving from the 'Hastings.' Why?"

"Oh, I think he said it was 'tough' and that he would have to leave it. I tried hard not to compliment him upon the altruism of his action. Certainly if one thing more than another is calculated to 'raise the tone' of a hotel, it is his leaving it."

"Lynn! you didn't tell him so?" shrieked her aunt.

"No," returned her niece, rather sorrowfully. "I didn't. I wish I had."

"*Lynn!*"

"I don't often neglect anything calculated to render me unpopular with him," continued Miss Thayer, composedly, "and when I do I'm always sorry for it, afterwards. You know that, Aunt Lucy?"

"Lynn, dear, don't use all those long words," adjured her aunt, piteously. "They do sound so clever. And men do so hate clever women. I don't mean that you are clever, you understand, dear," she continued, apologetically, "only that you appear so, sometimes."

"I wonder whether Mr. Lighton would dislike it if he thought I were clever!" queried Lynn with sudden interest.

"I don't know. I am afraid—"

"*How* I would scintillate if I only thought it would annoy him," Lynn said in a low voice.

Mrs. Thayer started, indignantly.

"I am thankful," she reflected in loud and severe accents, "that *I* was never afflicted with a desire to make myself unpleasant to estimable young men."

"Estimable! Aunt Lucy!"

"It is true," said Mrs. Thayer, putting two diminutive stitches in the collar which she was embroidering, "it is undeniably true, Lynn, that the poor boy has been a little wild. But he wants to settle down."

"If he wants to settle down with me, Aunt Lucy, he can want."

"Lynn, is that the remark of a lady?"

"It is; and, furthermore, it is the remark of a lady who knows her own mind."

Mrs. Thayer raised a tiny handkerchief to her eyes and deposited two tinier tears, thereupon. Long practice had made her an adept in the gentle art of weeping, by which art she had succeeded in establishing an absolute monarchy in her own home.

"Oh, Lynn, what a way to talk," she wept, gently, "when the poor boy is so fond of you and has such a good salary and a house of his own, besides. How few young men have houses of their own that you can walk right into as soon as you marry them! What are you laughing at? And anyway he is much too good for you and besides Eva Holt would jump at him."

"Let her jump."

"Ah, Lynn, you have no natural, womanly instincts."

"I am afraid I am lacking in some."

"Such a nice house as it is, too," sighed her aunt, "and all being done over—new plumbing, electric light and everything! Electric light is so nice to read by. How fortunate it is that his uncle di—that is to say, how fortunate it is that his uncle left it to him."

"Yes, indeed. There's something very attractive about electric lights," returned her niece, gravely.

Mrs. Thayer looked slightly puzzled and changed the subject.

"Mr. Lighton is really in many ways a very nice young man," she ventured, timidly. "And not a bit worse than lots of others."

"Not a bit!" assented the other. Her voice was still cheerful but her face had clouded a little. "The trouble is," she went on, rather absently, after a moment's pause, "the trouble is, he's worse-looking. Vice, pure and simple, one might tolerate; but vice, in conjunction with a vermilion nose"—

"Lynn!" interrupted her aunt with righteous indignation. "Mr. Lighton is as the Lord made him."

"The Lord! Brandy and soda!"

Mrs. Thayer had her answer ready in her pocket; she drew it out and deposited three more tears upon its snowy surface. Lynn hesitated; she had a truly masculine aversion to tears, an aversion which had cost her many a domestic battle.

"Please don't cry, Aunt Lucy," she burst forth at length. "I don't see why you are so very anxious to get me married. I thought you liked having me in the house. If you don't"—

"Of course I like having you," said the older woman, reproachfully. "But I must confess that it makes me feel dreadfully to think of having you, always—that is, I mean that it makes me feel dreadfully to see you throw away such good chances. For you know, Lynn, you are not in the least pretty."

"Dear Aunt Lucy, you have told me that so often," returned her niece, patiently. "But I cannot for the life of me see why the fact of my not possessing a Greek profile should make me want to marry Mr. Lighton."

"That is just where you are so incomprehensible. And, besides, he has such a lovely horse."

"His horse is certainly a dream. Unfortunately, though, it was not his horse who proposed. If I could marry the horse and lock the gentleman up in the stable, I'd do it with pleasure. O dear, why will you talk about it and make me say such horrid things. The plain truth of the matter is that I do not like the man and I hate talking about the whole affair. It irritates me, someway. I hate to see anything wasted."

"Then why do you"—

"Oh, Aunt Lucy, *don't* start it, again! after all I've said."

"I perceive at last," said Mrs. Thayer with dignity, "that I may as well let the matter drop."

"You might have seen that at first, if you had wished to," thought Lynn.

"I only hope you may never regret this."

"I hope so, too. By the way, I am going to drop in at Estelle's for tea at five. A lot of the girls are going there. Have you any message?"

"None, whatever; but, as you are going there, I trust that you will talk this matter over with her. You could not have a better confidante. Talk it over with her, won't you?"

"I don't think it is necessary to promise that," replied Lynn, wearily, "for she is quite certain to talk it over with me, which comes to the same thing in the end."

Mrs. Thayer compressed her lips and continued to embroider. Lynn departed to make some change in her toilet and, that being concluded, left the house. Once on the street her face changed and contracted a little, making her look curiously older.

"There are times," she said slowly, regarding the little terrier which gambolled joyfully at her side, "there are times, Bob, when I find the society of the four-legged portion of humanity infinitely more congenial than that of the two-legged. This is one of them. How I wish sometimes that Aunt Lucy were dumb or I deaf! How thankful I am that you can't talk reason with me or advise me for my good or do any other unpleasant thing of the kind, Bob. If they only knew what they were talking about! if they only knew why I can't marry Lighton or—or anyone else"—She broke off, abruptly, biting her lip as though in pain. "What's the use of thinking?" she went on, presently. "I've got to face Del and twenty other women nearly as sharp in five minutes' time and I can't show my feelings here in this horrible street, either. Oh, to get away from it all!—here, don't be a fool! You have about two minutes to pull yourself together in, you weak, whining—I'll put it out of my mind, entirely. Whom has Del asked, I wonder. If it's one of those vile functions where you're wedged tightly between layers of fat, stupid women who gabble inanely and continuously and spill ice-cream and coffee over your good clothes, I'll never forgive her. No, she said distinctly that it was just a few of the girls and she always tells the truth to me, if she doesn't to anyone else. Oh, Del, Del! I wonder if you are the right person to go by. I wonder what you would say if I were to tell you of all this miserable coil of deception and misery. Of course I know what you would say; you would say that I was a fool and so I am; that wouldn't help matters, much. What *could* you, or anyone suggest? Nothing, nothing that would be of any use; anyway, if I were dying for advice, I

am not free to obtain it. If I had an unfailing fund of common sense and a heart of stone what would I do, I wonder? God knows. Being myself I'll do what I'm doing—and God grant it can't last forever." She set her lips firmly and walked along until she reached Pine Avenue.

Pine Avenue lies at the foot of Mount Royal and, in fact, is built upon its slope. It is a broad, fine street and some of the handsomest residences in Montreal are situated upon, or, rather, directly above it. At all seasons of the year it is largely frequented and, in winter, is a favourite haunt of snowshoers and "skiers." At the present hour, however, it was practically deserted; and Lynn drew a long breath of relief as, leaving the crowded city streets behind, she sought its solitude. For some little time she walked on in silence.

The golden January sun turned Mount Royal into a mass of shining marble, flecked with skeleton-like maples and crowned with dark green pines. Beyond—behind its towering whiteness—lay the dead of Montreal. Lynn winced at the thought of them and fiercely refused to let her thought dwell on their impenetrable peace.

"I'm going to an At Home, Bob," she said, half-aloud, trying to laugh. "There will be about twenty other women there—and, in all probability, half of them are wearing veils over their faces like the minister in Hawthorne's story. 'I look around me and lo! on every visage a black veil.' Only people don't go in for black veils unless they're cowards; they go in for scarlet and gold, which makes a far better disguise and renders life more cheerful. What's the use of making a fuss? Anyway, whatever happens, whatever nasty knocks Fate may hand me, there is one thing she can't do—she can't make me whine." She threw her head back and laughed; then called the dog to her side and smiled as he licked her gloved hand.

"Del doesn't like you, old boy," she said, fondly. "But I'll hide you, somewhere, and I won't stay any longer than I can help. Ah! there's the house, already. It's just as well. I don't feel like being alone, to-day, more than I can help. I wonder why it is that things seem so much worse at some times than they do at others."

CHAPTER IX

"JUST A FEW OF THE GIRLS"

"'I must be my own Mamma,' said Becky."—*Thackeray.*

"She was clever, witty, brilliant and sparkling beyond most of her kind but possessed of many devils of malice and mischievousness. She could be nice, though, even to her own sex. But that is another story."—*Kipling.*

Mrs. Hadwell's home, whither her friend, Miss Thayer, was bound, contrived to be both home-like and imposing. Situated on a slope of the "mountain," as all loyal Montrealers call Mount Royal, it commanded an unsurpassed view of the city and harbour and was surrounded by a picturesque garden, unspoilt by overcultivation. In summer it assumed an appearance of fairy-like charm: and even when, as now, devoid of verdant ornament and encompassed only by the sighing branches of bare trees, it had an appearance of creature comfort, oddly at variance with the bleak, snow-crowned hills that rose behind it. Mount Royal, the pride of every Montrealer, boasts many another such home; but few combine dignity and cosiness in the measure which Mrs. Hadwell's did.

"Del's house is really awfully like her in many ways," Lynn Thayer reflected as she rang the bell. "It is so expensive and in such good taste and so comfortable and so cold—is Mrs. Hadwell in, Ella? Yes, I know she is, but see here! can you smuggle Bob somewhere where he won't be in the way of the girls? You know Mrs. Hadwell doesn't like dogs."

She divested herself of some of her wraps and crossed the hall. The perfume of roses pervaded the air and the soft strain of violins was faintly heard beneath the hubbub of voices as she made her way toward the large old-fashioned drawing-room whence the sounds of festivity proceeded. This room, hung with crimson velvet and panelled in dark oak, was almost sumptuous in its comfort. Beautifully carved Turkish lamps hung from the ceiling: a splendid wood fire burned on the hearth: great vases of dark red roses and carnations were disposed wherever opportunity offered: and, at the further end of the room, one caught a delicious glimpse of cool green ferns and various-coloured blooms. The room was filled with daintily dressed girls and young women: and behind a superlatively dainty tea table sat the hostess who hastily pushed aside a cream jug and rushed in the direction of her latest guest.

"Help yourselves, girls," she exclaimed. "I want to speak to Lynn. Why are you so late, child? and where have you been, lately? I haven't seen you for an age."

"Which, being interpreted, means four days," said Lynn, laughing and returning her hostess' kiss. "How lovely the rooms look, Del! and what a sweet

frock that is! I do like you in mauve."

"I think it *is* rather successful," said Mrs. Hadwell, contentedly: and both women laughed. In their girlhood days they had entered into a compact which had ever since been observed faithfully; namely, to tell no useless lies to one another. "Only don't let us forget to tell them to other people, Lynn," Mrs. Hadwell had remarked, solemnly. "Don't let it get us into bad habits." It had never got her into bad habits: she had lied her way successfully into public esteem, riches and an old man's heart; and, even on reaching the giddy pinnacle of social success where rudeness is frequently condoned, she had faithfully followed the policy of telling the truth only to her one intimate friend, Lynn Thayer.

"Edie, do pour Lynn some tea," she cried, now, turning to a pretty brown-eyed girl who hovered near, watching her adoringly. "And put piles and piles of cream in it and five lumps or so of sugar—that's the way she likes it, the incomprehensible creature! ... Another of those sickening debutantes," she observed in a confidential undertone, turning to Lynn and gently propelling her in the direction of a couch, "simply worships me, you know! follows me around like a dog and—that's right, dear! how sweet of you to save me the trouble! now get her an Italian cream and a nice cake, will you? like an angel!—I don't know what I shall do if it keeps up: you know I can't bear bread and butter misses and she actually asked me for a lock of my hair the other day. I felt like telling her that I paid eighty dollars for my switch in New York and that my own hair was too precious to—oh, *thank* you, dear! Lynn, this is the sweetest girl; she saves me all sorts of trouble and her name is Miss Roland; Edie, this is my friend, Miss Thayer, of whom you have often heard me speak—oh, dear! there are all the girls coming up to speak to you, Lynn, and anyway I ought to go and pour out some more tea. When you have done the polite, do come and keep me company at the tea-table."

"Little Mrs. Hadwell," as her friends usually called her, fled, casting a bewitching smile at the group of girls who were clustering about Lynn. Estelle Hadwell's teeth were her strong point, a fact which she never, for an instant, lost sight of. She had no complexion worth terming such, her features were irregular and her figure decidedly angular. Yet she contrived to be considered a beauty, as any woman can who has time and money to devote to her appearance.

Lynn watched her curiously as she settled herself at the tea-table with a coquettish little flirt of her silken skirts, and marvelled anew at the unconscious dramatic instinct which enabled this tiny creature to play the role of a beauty with such unfailing success. As "Little Mrs. Hadwell" sat pouring the tea with one pretty arm gracefully raised, she was a vision for an artist. Her mauve gown fell about her petite form in folds that were almost statuesque in their grace: her beautiful hair—which looked just as beautiful as though it had not grown on an Irish housemaid's head—was arranged with such taste as to make her small

head a thing of beauty: her really pretty neck and arms were set off by a fichu and falling cuffs of rich yellow lace. A cluster of violets was carelessly tucked in the front of her fichu: and a long chain of amethysts outlined her slender waist—which had hardly been so slender, had it not been for the skill and strength of her French maid. Altogether, as she sat there, Lynn recognized for the fiftieth time—and with precisely the same sense of wonder—that, in spite of Estelle's entire lack of beauty, she was the daintiest and most fascinating thing, imaginable.

Among the girls who surrounded Lynn were several whose beauty was sufficiently apparent to make them noticeable, anywhere. Edith Roland, the adoring debutante, had big, brown eyes, a pretty colour and a figure whose slenderness and grace owed nothing to artificial aid; yet, beside her diminutive hostess she sank into insignificance. Erma Reed was a beautiful girl, tall, splendidly proportioned with the features of a Greek statue and the air of a grand dame; but, after the first admiration which her almost flawless pulchritude provoked, one's eyes wandered instinctively to the sinuous figure and piquante, appealing face of Mrs. Hadwell. "Magnetism—that is the only word for it, I suppose," thought Lynn. "Yet she didn't always have it as she has it now. Can that sort of thing be cultivated, I wonder?"

"Lynn, we never see you, now," declared Joan Cadding, one of her friends. "What's the reason?"

"Old age, laziness and lots to do. At twenty-eight one can't be always gadding. Besides, a teacher must keep early hours."

"Oh, aged one, it is not so many years since a certain teacher was out every night in the week until one or two o'clock and absolutely refused even to lie down for half an hour when she left school at three. Mrs. Thayer used to say to mother, 'Really, Lynn must have the constitution of a horse; she comes home from school, skates for an hour, rushes into calling costume and drops into a dozen things before dinner: then, as soon as that is over, prepares for a dance or a tobogganing party.'"

"As you say, I was a few years younger, Joan."

"But why have you given everything up so? You can't complain of being shelved. Why, at the only dance where I've met you this winter your card was filled to overflowing before you had been in the room five minutes. You certainly can't worry about lack of attention."

"No, I have no beauty to fade and no youthful fascinations to take wing, so the people who liked me ten years ago are just as apt to like me, now."

"Then why do you slip out of things so? Even Del says she never sees you."

"Del means that I don't live here as I used to. I see her three or four times a week: any one but Del would be sick of me. But, seriously, girls, this idea of combining public school teacher and society girl isn't the best in the world. As

far as I know, I am the only woman who has ever done it successfully for years and I'm getting tired of it. And that reminds me! Do you want to hear a good story? I went to a man-tea at Mrs. Dean-Everill's the other day—you see I'm not altogether a hermit yet—and I met a Mrs. Howden there—a very common woman with money. No one else wanted to talk to her and she seemed a good-natured soul and anxious to be affable, so I sacrificed myself as usual. She simply beamed on me—till, in the course of conversation, it transpired that I taught from nine to three five days out of the seven. Then she froze: suddenly and completely did she freeze: and took the earliest opportunity of sidling away from my contaminating presence. A little later on I was talking to some of the other people when Dick Ashe, who has just returned from Europe, you know, rushed up to me and said in his usual boisterous way, 'Oh, Miss Thayer, you should see the lovely pin that your cousin, Lord Haviland, has entrusted to me for you.' I caught sight of the woman's face; she looked like a devotee who had unwittingly slapped a seraph. I felt so sorry for her that I hastened to murmur, 'Oh, Harry's only my third cousin, you know!' but even that didn't seem to wipe the tortured look from her fat face. Think what it must be to a social climber to have snubbed an earl's third cousin."

In the burst of laughter and talk which followed this, only Mrs. Hadwell noticed that Lynn had made a definite effort to turn the course of conversation from discussion of herself.

"Well," said Agatha Ladilaw in her flute-like voice, "I don't see what is amusing you all so. It couldn't have been very pleasant for Mrs. What's-her-name to think that she had been rude to an earl's third cousin: and, on the other hand, if Lynn were an ordinary teacher you couldn't expect her to be treated in the same way."

"Why not?" asked some one. Lynn merely laughed and looked at the first speaker with covert yet kindly mirth.

"I don't see why you laugh," said Agatha, with soft stubbornness.

"Why, you see, Agatha," said Lynn, looking at her thoughtfully, "this Mrs. Howden liked me till she found I was a teacher. Then she couldn't endure my society till it transpired that I was related to an earl. Then she loved me once more."

"And why shouldn't she?" asked Agatha, lifting her lovely lashes. "Earls are not so common."

"Not so common as snobs, no. Still having an earl for a cousin is no reason why people should like one."

"But you see, Lynn, it is a reason. You say, yourself, that she liked you as soon as she found it out."

Lynn abandoned argument.

"She liked me in the first place, too," she said, laughing.

"Oh, but then she didn't know you were a teacher," Agatha explained, very sensibly.

"She liked me until I was found out, in other words."

"Exactly," said Agatha, pleased to find that her logic had penetrated. "It often happens so. Look at that young Italian with the lovely eyes who wrote the magnificent poetry that you weren't allowed to read! and had to smuggle into the dormitory at night after the lights were out! Now everybody raved about him until they found that he took opium and drank."

"And then they promptly dropped him: just as this Mrs. Howden did Lynn, when she found that she taught. It's an exactly parallel case," agreed Mrs. Hadwell, looking straight at Lynn with a perfectly innocent face and inwardly wondering how her friend could preserve such a stony impenetrability of countenance.

"Certainly it is," said Agatha, triumphantly, "except that of course it's wicked to drink and it's quite respectable to teach. But it comes to the same thing in the end."

"So many things do," said Lynn with a little laugh. "Still, Agatha, it's not necessarily wickedness that makes people drink. Some people drink in the same way that they breathe—because to stop would be to die or to go mad."

"What unpleasant people," said Agatha, virtuously. "I'm glad I'm not like that. Still, even if I were I'm sure that I could stop it—I can't understand people being so weak. And, speaking of that Ricossia—whatever became of him? He was so wicked and he did look so nice in evening clothes. I used to be awfully gone on him and so were all the girls in the Sixth. It wasn't because he was wicked, you know," she added hastily.

"No, indeed; the wickedness of Beelzebub would have availed him nothing if he hadn't also been decorative in evening clothes. Agatha, don't you want this little chocolate cake with the nut in the top?"

Agatha did: and she also wanted some information on the subject of Ricossia.

"Why are you so determined not to talk about him? He was your protégé from the start. You took him up—you and Mr. Amherst—I don't believe he would ever have been so popular and run after if you hadn't started it."

"Yes, what has become of that boy?" queried Mrs. Hadwell with sudden interest. "Of course he has gone to the dogs, we all know that: but what particular dogs and where?"

"I am not his keeper," answered Lynn, lightly. "Do you know that it's about time I left, Del?"

"Oh, no!" cried Mrs. Hadwell, starting up. "You mustn't. Why, you don't even know why I asked you to come here, this afternoon: you simply must stay

long enough to hear that."

"Well, I'll stay five minutes"—

"Very well, five minutes!" returned Mrs. Hadwell, who knew quite well how long a period of time five minutes can cover. "Now, girls, attend! You knew that Henry's brother Carl settled in the States and that he has a grown-up family. Well, the third child is twins—I mean the third children are twins—well, never mind! what's the use of explaining when you all know what I mean, anyway. The point is that I've invited them one and all to visit me, every year: but they've consistently refused because the brother is indignant at Henry's marrying a young wife, just when they had quite come to count on getting his money. These twins, however, seem to have a mind between them—they're only nineteen, too, I believe—very young to have a mind, even if it is only half a one—and they have written with gusto, accepting my invitation and telling me that they're dying to see something of the Canadian sports. Now, as you know, I've no taste for sports and I thought some of you might help me out. They are only going to be here for a week or so, as they both go to college, and I want to give them what our American friends call 'a real good time.' I have thought of several of the ordinary things—a tea for the girls and a bridge the night after they arrive: and a little later on, I am going to give a fancy dress ball—yes, consider yourselves all invited—but I thought it would be nice if I got a few of you girls together and organized some parties for tobogganing and ice-boating and so on."

"Don't forget the Conquerors-Wales hockey match."

"No, detestable thing! they'll want to see that, I suppose. I can't stand hockey. Lynn, you're not going?"

"I must. It's getting very late."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Mrs. Hadwell, piteously: and at that moment, the clang of the doorbell, followed by the advent of a fresh visitor, seemed to give the lie to Miss Thayer's assertion.

"Mrs. Langham-Greene! Lynn, forgive me. I swear I didn't ask her," murmured the hostess: then glided forward eagerly.

"So glad to see you. What good genius prompted you to drop in this particular afternoon? *All* the girls have done the same. (And if that doesn't pacify her," reflected the ingenuous hostess, "nothing will.")

The newcomer laughed, a pretty, soft, disagreeable laugh, and glanced about her.

"So I see," she rejoined, smoothly. "We old married women will have to entertain one another. These young girls," her glance wandered from Lynn Thayer to two or three others and she smiled thoughtfully, "these young girls have their own topics of conversation."

"Now that," said Mrs. Hadwell to herself with unwilling admiration, "is

neat, distinctly neat. Insult to me, insult to my best friend and insult to half a dozen of my guests and all in one short breath. Lynn, you're not going?" she added, aloud.

"I am indeed. Bob will be wondering what's become of me."

"*Bob*! You didn't bring him here?"

"I did, Del. You know I'm away all day and Aunt Lucy never takes him out. Poor little fellow! it's pathetic, the way he greets me when I get home."

"Miss Thayer is such an attractive person, isn't she?" murmured Mrs. Langham-Greene with a peculiar gleam in her lazy cat-like eyes. "She has such a fascination—for dogs and cats."

"You, Mrs. Langham-Greene," returned Lynn with equal sweetness, "can have *no* idea how nice it is to be able to fascinate something."

With that, she left. Mrs. Hadwell was delighted with the Parthian shot and indignant at Mrs. Langham-Greene's impudence in classing herself with her hostess under the title of "old married women." She therefore launched forth into a eulogy of her absent friend which, judging from appearances, went far to spoil the elegant widow's enjoyment of her cup of tea.

"Lynn is such a favourite with men, too," she concluded.

"Really," rejoined the green-eyed siren, carelessly. "But girls who teach do age so rapidly, don't you think so, Mrs. Hadwell? and they are apt to become soured and to mistake rudeness for repartee."

"A mistake that is frequently made," said Mrs. Hadwell, inwardly furious. "But, when one has such a clever tongue as Lynn, don't you think one is apt to take advantage of duller people than one's self?" Agatha broke in.

"Isn't it funny, Mrs. Hadwell, how Lynn never will talk about Mr. Ricossia? She used to like him so much. And I am sure she must know what has become of him."

"Dreadful creature!" purred Mrs. Langham-Greene, arching her delicate eyebrows. "Your friend wasn't really infatuated with him, was she, Mrs. Hadwell? People do talk so."

"Don't they?" assented Mrs. Hadwell, looking grieved. "I daresay even you and I don't escape. Poor Lynn presumed on her twenty-eight years and her plain face to take a sisterly interest in an eccentric genius, little more than a child in years; and people immediately assume that she must be in love with him. So absurd! As if a girl who—oh, they are all going! what a shame! How I wish you had dropped in a little sooner, Mrs. Langham-Greene. We've had a delightful

chat but such a short one!"

CHAPTER X
"A FIN-DE-SIECLE PAIR"

> "I have seen Hayes argue with a tough horse—I have seen a tonga driver coerce a stubborn pony—I have seen a riotous setter broken to gun by a hard keeper—but the breaking-in of Pluffles ... was beyond all these."—*Kipling.*

"But, Henry, you should be glad to see your brother's children."

"I don't see why. A pair of young ragamuffins who'll pull the house about my ears."

"My dear Henry! They're nineteen."

"Worse and worse! The boy will be certain to fall in love with you."

"Do you think so?" asked Mrs. Hadwell, eagerly.

"I think it won't be your fault if he doesn't," responded her husband with acerbity.

"Well, at all events the girl won't fall in love with you," said Mrs. Hadwell with a twinkle in her eye.

Her spouse grunted something unintelligible.

"Not if she sees you with that expression on your face," went on Mrs. Hadwell, rather sadly. "It always seems so strange to me that a man of your experience and charm—a finished man of the world, in other words—should give way to these useless moods."

Mr. Hadwell's brow slightly cleared in spite of his efforts to hide the fact.

"If I had seen when I first met you," went on Mrs. Hadwell in chastened accents, "that, beneath the mask of courtly politeness and delicate flattery, you concealed the nature of a gloomy tyrant."

"Da—I mean, confound it all!" said Mr. Hadwell, much affected, "what on earth do you want, Estelle?"

"Why, I'm afraid I don't quite understand you," said Mrs. Hadwell, raising her pretty eyebrows in pained surprise.

"My dear little girl, you know I am not a tyrant," said Mr. Hadwell, miser-

able at the thought of being so misunderstood, yet, at the same time, secretly delighted at the reference to his "courtly politeness." His delight was natural when one considers the fact that, at no time of his life, had his manners surpassed those of an average groom.

"No—perhaps not," said Mrs. Hadwell, softly. "Yet, Henry, there are times when—when—"

"When what, darling?" inquired Mr. Hadwell, abjectly.

"When," said Mrs. Hadwell with sorrowful dignity, "when, Henry, I am actually afraid to ask you for the little extra money which will provide for the entertainment of your brother's children."

"Must they be so much entertained?" asked Mr. Hadwell, humbly yet uneasily. He was a kind old man, but the prospect of parting with a dollar never failed to cause him acute agony.

"They need not be entertained," responded Mrs. Hadwell with feeling. "Those unfortunate children may come here and stay with us three weeks and return to Ohio to tell their father and mother that the woman who has deprived them of their uncle's fortune, grudges them a ball or a"— She wept: and Mr. Hadwell writhed in agony. There were only two things in life that he really loved: his big income and his small wife. Of the two, he really preferred his wife: and after a few moments' silent struggle, he succumbed to her tears and her fascinations and drew out his cheque book.

"How much?" he inquired, hardily.

Little Mrs. Hadwell dried her eyes.

"How much?" she inquired, innocently. "How mu—oh, Henry! were you thinking of giving me some money?"

Mr. Hadwell regarded her with perplexity.

"Isn't that what you wanted?" he inquired looking puzzled.

Mrs. Hadwell buried her eighty-dollar head in her pretty hands.

"I wanted you to show some interest in these children—your own brother's children!" she wept. "And you—offer—me—money!"

Mr. Hadwell groaned, feeling that he was a tactless brute yet not quite seeing why. Suddenly a bright thought struck him: he tore out a blank cheque, signed it and tossed it playfully to his wife.

"There, there!" he observed, soothingly. "Don't cry any more, Estelle. Of course these children must be entertained—of course I am pleased about their coming. But, you see, we business men have so much to worry us."

Mr. Hadwell's business consisted in driving to his office every morning, receiving the obsequious greetings of his manager—and drawing his handsome income. Mrs. Hadwell knew this as well—better than he did—therefore——

"Of course," she cooed, drying her eyes and regarding her spouse with min-

gled awe and wonder. "Of course, dear. You must forgive me if I seem a little unreasonable, sometimes; but it did hurt me so when you seemed to think that all I wanted from you was money"——

"Of course—of course!" said her husband, hastily. "Now I must be off. What are you going to do, to-day?"

"Well, let me see! Lynn is coming to dinner and we are going for a drive first."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hadwell, looking pleased. He heartily approved of Lynn and took great pleasure in the thought that this exceptionally "nice" young woman was his wife's best friend; feeling that Estelle's evident devotion to Lynn overbalanced her quite as evident love of flattery and attention. Mr. Hadwell never forgot that Lynn insisted on teaching in the public schools rather than allow her uncle to support her, wholly: a piece of unselfishness that went straight to his heart. Needless to say, he did not know that Estelle had talked him over with Lynn from every point of view, both before and after his marriage to the former.

Estelle Harding had been the granddaughter of a wealthy man who had died when she was sixteen, leaving her penniless. For the next five years she had lived with different relatives, positively refusing to follow the example of her friend, Lynn Thayer, who was preparing at the High and Normal schools, to earn her living as a teacher. Being tremendously popular both with girls and boys, she was deluged with invitations and love affairs; but at twenty-one, she met Mr. Hadwell, a wealthy and retiring bachelor of sixty-three, and, from that time on, she paid assiduous and tactful court to him. The net result of this campaign was that, in six months from the time she had first met him, Mr. Hadwell was a married man. It speaks well for our small heroine's tactics that her husband, to his dying day, believed that he had fallen madly in love with her when he saw her first and that nothing but his overpowering fascinations had induced the shy damsel to become his wife. "You were the first man who had ever cared for me," Estelle would say to him, sometimes. "The others—oh, they were just boys! I couldn't look up to them, dear: they were on a level with myself." This was a particularly tactful lie on Mrs. Hadwell's part: she knew well that among her admirers had been young men whose intellect and strength of character had far surpassed her husband's. But tactful lying was Mrs. Hadwell's forte.

Many and varied were the comments on Miss Harding's engagement. "Little cat! how clever she is," said some. The majority, however, murmured feelingly, "So glad that sweet girl will have her reward."

"That sweet girl" had had her reward. All that she cared for in life—money, social position, unlimited flattery and envy were hers without stint. And, much as I hate to grieve the moralists, Estelle Hadwell was a supremely happy and contented woman. If she had been childless it is possible that her lot might, at

times, have palled on her: but two pretty, healthy children occupied what little heart she had. Her husband, though in a vague way proud of his children's beauty and brightness, cared little for them: what heart *he* had was occupied by his wife who played upon his affections with the hand of a practised artist.

She let the cheque lie by her plate, now, as she rose and kissed her better half, affectionately.

"What a delightful visit those dear twins will have, thanks to your generosity," she said, smiling at him, affectionately.

Mr. Hadwell waved a patronizing disclaimer.

"Oh, I shall be glad to do what I can for Carl's children," he said, magnificently.

"That is so like you, dear," returned his simple little wife, gently.

She was giggling softly to herself over this conversation in the afternoon as she pinned an expensive little hat over her still more expensive tresses. "I really do think I am cleverer than most women," she mused. "I get just what I want and I never hurt the dear old thing's feelings." She was really fond of her husband whose absorption in her satisfied her vanity and whose jealousy served to render life interesting. When Lynn Thayer arrived she entered into a long and detailed account of her morning's work, ending by triumphantly displaying the cheque. Lynn laughed, unwillingly.

"I do hate that sort of thing, Estelle," she said. "I know you're awfully clever at getting your own way, but I can never understand why you don't get Mr. Hadwell to allow you a certain sum, monthly. Then you wouldn't have to stoop to this sort of thing."

"Oh, but I like stooping," said Estelle, placidly. "And, besides, if I knew just how much I was going to get every month it would be awfully tame. You haven't a bit of the gambler in you, Lynn."

"Not a particle."

"Then there's another side to the question. If Henry had to make me an allowance he would only allow for necessities. For instance, if I wanted to run down to New York for a week or two it would have to come out of my dress allowance. That would be horrid. Oh, I had such a time getting a few hundred dollars out of him the last time I went. He wrangled over every detail—actually wanted me to stay in the suburbs because hotels were cheaper there, quite forgetting that my fare in and out would amount to something. As I said to him, 'I suppose I could walk to the ferry—it's only twenty miles or so each way and exercise is good for one—but I really couldn't walk across the water; I'm not *quite* divine yet!'"

"You absurd child! What did he say to that?"

"Oh, he mumbled something to the effect that I ought to be a Christian

Scientist. That was meant as a joke. He always jokes when he feels ashamed. So I said, 'Yes, if I were a Christian Scientist I could walk over anything, yourself included; but because I am only your poor, stupid, little wife, I must humbly beg you for money for this little trip.' Then he tried to be pompous, the way he always does when I pretend to knuckle down. He said, 'If I don't want you to go to New York, that ought to be enough for any well-regulated wife.' And I said, 'You dear old stupid! I'm not a well-regulated wife. Don't be so ridiculous. Anyone would think I was a watch to hear you talk!' Then I looked cute and rolled my eyes at him and he caved right in. Dear me, Lynn, what a pity it is I can't bestow some of my superfluous cleverness on you. Your aunt tells me that you are positively discouraging Mr. Lighton. You must be mad."

"I am mad—thoroughly mad about the whole business. Why in the world should I marry this man simply because he asks me? Really, I have been so advised and dictated to and badgered about him that now the very thought of his face makes me feel angry."

"Then why do you think of his face?" inquired Mrs. Hadwell, opening her grey eyes, innocently. "Why don't you forget about his face and think about his figure at the bank? That is what any sensible girl would do."

Lynn groaned. "I'm not a sensible girl, unfortunately," she said. "Now, Del, if you're going for a drive before dinner you had better hurry."

"Very well. I'm ready. Dear me! I must just see Mrs. Waite before we go and tell her to have dinner at seven. Oh, Lynn! that woman is such a comfort to me. She's a regular automaton, knows how everything in the house should be done—and does it! Of course she is absolutely heartless, but—what are you giggling at? Oh, my dear, I may not be particularly intense or passionate, but I assure you I am a volcano beside Mrs. Waite. She doesn't care for the children, she doesn't even care for me. Now you know there must be something radically wrong with any one who doesn't care for me—I may have my faults, but no one can deny that I am the most fascinating person!—and in her case it is the stranger as she is a decayed gentlewoman and I have gone out of my way to show her kindness. Why, I even asked her to dine with Henry and me once when we had people who knew her coming to dinner: and she looked at me with her Medusa-like countenance and refused. But as a housekeeper she is a jewel and, as long as she runs my house like clockwork, I can excuse her lack of geniality. Here she is. Oh, Mrs. Waite, will you tell Sarah to put off dinner till eight. I am going out with Miss Thayer. By the way, you don't know Miss Thayer, do you? Miss Thayer, Mrs. Waite. Don't forget about dinner.

"There, isn't she a Gorgon, Lynn? She is always just like that—neat, accurate, frigid, freezing. Ugh! What a lovely day for a drive, isn't it? I'm going to Mr. Amherst's to take a look at my portrait. It is going to be so nice and I

want you to see it. I am sure it will be hung in the Art Gallery at the Spring Exhibition. What a nice man he is, isn't he? By the way, speaking of Mrs. Waite, I am going to tell you why I always make a point of introducing her to all my friends and having things just as pleasant for her as possible. It's because she's like that much-talked-of 'skeleton at the feast'; she's a perpetual reminder to me of how lucky I am. I wish you would compare us and take a lesson, my friend. I'm the bright example, she's the awful warning. I might have been just where she is to-day if I hadn't had my wits about me. She might be where I am if she had made the most of her opportunities. Don't waste time telling me that she's plain and uninteresting. I would be plain if I didn't dress properly and eat good food and take good care of myself; and, as for 'interesting,' *every* woman is interesting to a man if she impresses him as being sensible and womanly—that is, if she enjoys his conversation and tells him that she likes dusting. Every man likes a woman who is fond of dusting. I don't know why. And, as for sweeping, there is no surer passport to a man's affections than to tell him that you sweep out your own room every morning. It never fails to have the desired effect. It doesn't matter if the man is a multi-millionaire with an army of housemaids and footmen; he still thinks it is womanly and domestic to sweep. If I ever found my hold on Henry's affections becoming a trifle slack, I should immediately start sweeping."

"Del, I don't think I ever met anyone who could talk more nonsense than you, in a given space of time."

"Nonsense! Oh, Lynn, if I could only get you to understand that what I am saying, although delivered as if it were the merest airy persiflage, is the soundest common sense. If you want to be admired and respected by the male sex—sweep! Or, if you don't like sweeping, don't sweep; but talk about sweeping as if it were the one thing that you doted on; convey the impression that you would rather sweep than go motoring any day. The man in question may have thought you a charming girl before, but, after that, his feelings will take a deeper tinge; you will advance in his mind to the status of a womanly woman. Delicious! Instead of these lectures girls are always attending at Y.W.C.A.'s and colleges, about Browning and the Pyramids and the condition of the poor and the prevalence of frivolity, what a pity it is they can't attend lectures given by some past-master in the art of flirting—such as I, for instance! Wouldn't those lectures be crowded, though; that is, if girls knew what was good for them. And here you have all the advantages of a private course of instruction and you won't take the trouble to learn the first rules of the game. Ah, the golden words of wisdom wasted! the opportunities lost. Ah me!"

"Del, I strongly object to your speaking as though I had no opportunities. Haven't I always at least one person who wants to marry me? even though I do

tell the truth occasionally?"

"You have. But that's by good luck, not by management. You might have twenty if you exerted yourself properly."

"You make me feel as though I were a sort of derelict. It's a horrid feeling."

"If I succeed in making you feel a derelict I have succeeded beyond my wildest expectations. Don't you know, my dear child, that you are experiencing in a faint degree what you will experience all your life if you don't hurry up and settle yourself. Don't you know that for the next fifty years you will, not only feel, but be a derelict if you don't accept Lighton and marry him before he changes his mind."

"Thank goodness, this drive can't last forever," exclaimed Lynn, laughing. "Otherwise I should be compelled to get out and walk. You are perfectly unendurable sometimes, Del, and this is certainly one of the times."

"I'm going to be unendurable again and to better purpose, I hope, a little later on," said Mrs. Hadwell, darkly. "But now I suppose we'll have to descend—or ascend, if you like it better—from practical life to pictures. Mr. Amherst paints well, doesn't he? And what a nice man he is. I don't know anyone who doesn't like him, do you?"

"No, I don't think I do. He's nice and very popular."

"And a great friend of yours too, isn't he? I haven't heard you speak of him, lately. I thought at one time"—

"Oh, Del, do think of something else!" exclaimed Lynn a little crossly. "Men, men, men—and marriage, marriage, marriage! *Do* let us think and talk of something else."

"Very well, my dear, we'll talk of myself. I wanted to get up a flirtation with Mr. Amherst this winter and he didn't seem to respond at all. So I immediately thought that he must be interested in someone else and, as he was always calling on you, naturally I thought"—

"Men again!"

"Not men but a man. Don't you perceive the delicate distinction? Well, as I was saying, Mr. Amherst didn't seem a bit interested in me, charming though I am and was—what a mercy old Tom is stone deaf!—and I was extremely puzzled. I didn't like to be too pointed in my attentions"—

"I do wish, Del, that you wouldn't talk in that way. It sets my teeth on edge to hear a married woman speak in the way you do. Why don't you"—

"Stay at home and attend to my house and children? So I do; but not being altogether a fossil yet I want to do something else at times. Isn't that natural at my age?"

"Quite natural at your age, and there is just the weak point of a marriage like yours. If you had married somebody you really cared about, other men

wouldn't interest you."

"Not for the first year or so, no. After that, they would. I might not like them so well as I did my husband, but I should like them and want them to like me. Yes, and I should want them to fall in love with me, too, so long as they didn't tell me about it and insist on making unpleasant scenes. Of course, in that case, they would go, just as they do, now. You know that, Lynn."

"Yes, I know that. You are very careful, Del. I suppose it is all right and quite harmless in its way, but I can't say that I approve of it. What is the sense of having two or three men always sighing around because they can't marry you?"

"What's the sense of music or flowers or strawberry tarts? I like them and they agree with me. You know there is a lot of misconception with regard to the real tastes of a young woman after she marries. If she is a person who grows and develops she must, of necessity, like many things besides her husband and children. Now here is a case in point. Because I am devoted to my own children is that any reason why I should not be fond of other people's children? As a matter of fact, I don't care much for any children but my own; but, if I did, wouldn't that be blameless and even praiseworthy? So with men. I should always like them all even if I were eighty and had been married all my life."

"It's a funny thing, Del, but some way you never seem married, to me."

"I was married, I assure you. I remember it very distinctly. White is not becoming to me, so I wore a dark blue cashmere dress and a stunning black toque with little feathers—you remember? And Henry thought I was so sensible and so above feminine frivolities."

"It is awfully hard to know what is right and wrong, I must say. You certainly make Mr. Hadwell perfectly happy and you are an ideal mother. Perhaps you are more in the right than I think."

"My dear, I have read somewhere that there are certain plants which die just as soon as they have propagated. That is all they exist for; just to reproduce their own life and then die. Now there are a good many women in the world who are like these plants. They are not half as good mothers, not half as satisfactory wives as I am; but they are devoid of all possibility of offending because, to all intents and purposes, they died with the birth of their first child. Henceforth they exist in a modified form. They are no longer individuals but vegetables. All the young plant needs is air and light; but, as the young human needs food, clothes, exercise and various other things, they exist solely for the purpose of furnishing it with those things. They are incapable of holding an opinion or formulating a thought; they all think exactly alike on all subjects—which means, practically, that they do not think at all—their education, intellectually, stopped when they graduated from school, their education, emotionally, when they married. Are they more commendable than I? What do they do that I don't? Only I do other

things in addition. I am a living woman, not a maternal cipher. I have a heart and a mind and a life of my own and these develop side by side with the development of my children. Of course the mere fact of life existing means that there are possibilities of mistakes being made, faults being committed; but isn't it better to live than to die? Lynn, I didn't know I was so clever! Aren't you proud of me?"

"Proud of you, all round, Del, except that I still wish you didn't flirt. Even if you are not in love with your husband it is bad form to publish the fact. And the very fact that you are still alive—very much alive—and capable of leading a life apart from your children makes your way of acting dangerous. I am always afraid that some day you will"—

"That some day I shall fall in love and make a fool of myself? Don't worry. Some women are dominated by one of the great primal instincts, some by another. I am a mother, first and last and always. Men are only things to play with, but my children are necessities. I could never do anything that would cause them a moment's anxiety or difficulty in the future. No, my dear! When little Aileen is enjoying her first season her mother will be the same irreproachable, if frivolous, matron that she is at present. What a serious conversation we have drifted into, haven't we? I don't like it—seriousness! Dear me, Lynn, what in the world should I do if anything were to happen to you? You're the only person whom I dare to be myself with. Catch me trusting another woman. What makes you so unlike other women, Lynn?"

"Possibly the lack of sense for which you were upbraiding me so heartily a little while ago," said Lynn, slyly. "By the way, Del, that name, 'Waite,' is strangely familiar to me. Oh, of course! I know, now. I had a little pupil, once"—

"Oh, Lynn, please don't start to talk about those ragamuffins of yours. I should think you would be glad to put them out of your mind for a few hours."

"He was a most unfortunate child," pursued Lynn, unheeding. "He was plain and stupid and he knew it: and he came from a different social class from most of the others, which seemed to put the final touch to his isolation. I was glad when he died, poor little chap! He was devoted to me and I made a great pet of him because he seemed so lonely. I wonder if"—

"Oh, a Gorgon-faced, icebergy automaton like Mrs. Waite never had a child in her life, I'm sure. Here we are at last."

CHAPTER XI

VISITORS AND DISCLOSURES

"Knowledge comes but wisdom lingers."—*Tennyson.*

"I would that you were all to me.
You that are just so much, no more,
Nor yours, nor mine, not slave nor free!
Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be."
—*Browning.*

"I love studios," announced Mrs. Hadwell with effusion, "and I love artists. Not you, only, Mr. Amherst, but all artists. They're so interesting."

"Don't, please don't, Mrs. Hadwell," implored Amherst, laughing. "I have always hoped that my habit of keeping my head closely cropped and my face carefully shaved would save me from being thought 'interesting.' You have no idea what visions that word 'interesting' conjures up in the mind of the average man. Dinky velvet coats, unkempt beards, dirty hands, soulful eyes—don't, whatever else you do, call me 'interesting.' You might as well call a spoilt beauty a 'nice, sensible girl.'"

"That is something that no one ever called me," said Mrs. Hadwell thoughtfully, tugging at her gloves. "You needn't look at me, Mr. Amherst; I feel like staying here a while and I'm going to stay, no matter how busy you are—there, don't apologize or waste time in saying you'll be glad to see me and have me stay. Of course you will—a sensible man like you! What were we saying when you interrupted me—I mean, when I interrupted myself? Oh, yes! I was saying that no one had ever called me a 'nice, sensible girl.'"

"The reason is obvious," declared Amherst, laughing.

"Why—oh, I see! Thank you. You mean that I don't look sensible. No, I should hope I didn't. I should hate to!"

"I don't know whether I look sensible," said Lynn, wheeling suddenly round from the contemplation of a picture, "but people must think I do, for I so often hear myself referred to as 'that nice, sensible girl.' Is it an insult? I never thought of it in that light."

"Not an insult, dear," said Mrs. Hadwell, composedly, "but an undoubted lie. Of all people who lack the first elements of sense you certainly head the list. Doesn't she, Mr. Amherst? But no, of course, you wouldn't think so, naturally. You're a man, and anyway, you don't know her."

"I should have said I knew Miss Thayer pretty well," said Amherst, looking surprised, "and I should certainly have thought that she was very sensible. I don't see what you mean."

"Of course you don't. As I previously remarked, you're a man. You think she's sensible and I have little doubt but that, in your heart of hearts, you think I'm a foolish little thing. Yet there's more sense in my little finger than there is in all of Lynn's tall body. *I* know."

"What you call sense I call lying and cheating," returned Lynn, composedly.

Amherst burst out laughing.

"You and Miss Thayer are certainly the most candid pair I have ever run across," he cried. "Do you always give and return these insults in perfect good faith? or does one or the other sometimes get annoyed?"

"Never," replied Lynn. "I can't imagine anything happening to make Del and me quarrel. In fact, I don't believe we could quarrel. I don't know what other people fight about, anyway. Do you, Del?"

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Hadwell. "They fight because one has a better hat than the other or because one likes red and the other likes blue, but, generally, because they both want the same man. Isn't that so, Mr. Amherst? But, you see, in this case, Lynn and I never like the same man, so we don't clash."

"But even if we did," said Lynn, emphatically, "I can't imagine either of us doing anything so vulgar as to quarrel, Del. I'm sure if the man preferred you, you could have him; and, if he preferred me, I'd give him up to you without a moment's hesitation."

"I wonder!" said her friend, teasingly. "Suppose I had taken a fancy to that absurd boy with the black eyes and the unpronounceable Italian name—would you have given him up to me, Lynn? I doubt it. Do you remember him, Mr. Amherst? Wasn't it funny, the way our dear sensible Lynn bowed down before him? I think it must have been her attentions that drove him to drink, don't you? he probably thought that he was in imminent danger of being dragged to the altar."

Lynn smiled a little but stirred restlessly and did not make any comment on this.

"What has become of that boy?" cried Mrs. Hadwell, suddenly. "There, now! I'm so glad I thought to ask you. You ought to know if anyone would; you were quite pals, weren't you, Mr. Amherst? Is the boy dead?"

"Unfortunately, no," returned Amherst, dryly.

"Then what's become of him?"

"Are you, too, interested in his fate, Miss Thayer?" asked Amherst, turning to where she stood looking intently at him, as though something hung on his answer. "You used to be very good to him, as Mrs. Hadwell says. Would you like to know where he is, now?"

"Yes—no—yes, I should like to very much," said Lynn in a low voice.

"Well, he is within a few minutes' walk of this place."

"You don't say so! And what is he doing?" asked Mrs. Hadwell with much excitement.

"Going to the devil as fast as he possibly can."

"How? Why? Wherefore? Lynn, I shall shake you in another minute if you don't show a little more interest. This is positively the most exciting thing. Think of it! Ricossia!—going to the Devil with a big D!—within a few minutes' walk of this place. What's his address, Mr. Amherst?"

"I—I don't feel at liberty to tell you that," responded Amherst, after a slight hesitation. "I don't think he would like to have it known."

"Oh, he must be a terribly shady character," said Mrs. Hadwell with a delighted chuckle. "I think all this is thrilling. Do tell me his address. I won't hurt him. I only want to see for myself what he is doing and how he is. I'll—I'd like to take him a glass of jelly and some grapes. What's the matter, Mr. Amherst?"

"Excuse me. The idea of Ricossia in conjunction with the glass of jelly and the grapes upset me for the moment, that is all."

"I'd take him some champagne if Lynn wasn't with me. In my most abandoned moments I never forget that I am a chaperon so I'm afraid the champagne will have to be left behind. But I will go and see him—Mr. Amherst, do tell me."

Amherst smilingly shook his head.

"He wouldn't like it, I know."

"You're quite right," said Lynn, regarding the speaker, gratefully. "I'm sure he wouldn't like it. I wouldn't, in his place. Do—do you ever see him, Mr. Amherst?"

"Often. I frequently run over and just have an eye to him. I always expect to find him frozen or burnt to death or something of that sort. But Providence always looks after people of that kind. He'll die in his bed, no fear—the little brute!"

Lynn started and flushed.

"I thought you liked him," she said with involuntary reproach in her tone.

"Well—fact is, I don't. What's more, I don't know anyone who does. The boy's unfit to live and about equally unfit to die—poor little chap! It's wonderful, though, the way he lasts. He's a living example of a theory I've always held, namely, that consumption doesn't really kill, no matter what the hardships may be, until the consumptive loses interest in life and living. Then, he goes very quickly."

"You may be right," said Lynn, tonelessly.

"Now, while Mrs. Hadwell is absorbed in the bald man with the red nose who is hanging at the other end of the room," said Amherst, hastily, "I want to ask you something. How is it that I never see you, now? It must be a month since I last had a real talk with you. What's the matter?"

"The matter? Why, nothing."

"You're not offended with me about anything?"

"Why, no."

"In the last few weeks I must have rung you up a dozen times, but you have always been out or engaged. You must lead a busy life."

"I do," said Lynn, smiling faintly. "But I am sorry you thought I didn't want to see you. It wasn't that."

"Wasn't it?"

Amherst's voice changed.

"Do you know that you have avoided me ever since that night at the Burns'?"

"I—I hadn't thought about it."

"Is that the truth?"

Lynn was silent: then—

"Not exactly," she said with a faint effort.

"I tried to say something to you that evening—you remember?"

"Yes."

"Why wouldn't you let me say it?"

"I thought you had better not," said Lynn in a low voice.

"Don't say that; not unless you mean me to understand that"—

"Mr. Amherst," broke in Mrs. Hadwell, imperatively, "you are a horrid man! First you refuse to give me Ricossia's address, next you stand and talk to Miss Thayer in a low voice without giving me a chance to show her my portrait. She's dying to see it, aren't you, Lynn? and it's getting so dark. Can't you drive back with me and take dinner? then you can talk to Lynn as much as ever you want and Mr. Hadwell and I will sit by like deaf-mutes and play propriety. Won't you?"

"Awfully sorry!" said Amherst with genuine regret in his voice. "I have an engagement of long standing, so it's impossible. But if you'll only repeat the invitation, I'd love to come. Will you?"

"I will," responded Mrs. Hadwell. "I'll look up my engagement book and see if we can find an evening when we shall all be free. In the meantime, let me ask you what this means, this little wrinkle in my brow? I've puzzled over it for at least ten minutes and I demand to have it explained. If it is copied from life,

you must simply paint it out, that's all!"

CHAPTER XII
THE VIEWS OF TWO WOMEN

"Is it your moral of Life?
Such a web, simple and subtle,
Weave we on earth here in impotent strife,
Backward and forward each throwing his shuttle,
Death ending all with a knife."
—*Browning.*

"The time has come, the Walrus said, to talk of many things," quoted Mrs. Hadwell, settling back in her easy-chair with intense satisfaction. If, as the poet asserts, "a sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things" certainly a joy's crown of joy may be remembering unhappier things. One principal reason for Mrs. Hadwell's calm and unlimited enjoyment of her life lay in the fact that her youth had been spent in other people's easy-chairs. It is noteworthy that it had been spent in easychairs; women of her type always do spend their lives in easy-chairs, metaphorical and literal; but an easy-chair bestowed upon one by a doting husband, and an easy-chair occupied by sufferance in other people's homes are, as will readily be perceived, two very different pieces of furniture.

"What do you want to talk about in particular?" Lynn asked, regarding her hostess lazily. Dinner was over; Mr. Hadwell had betaken himself to his club; and the two sat at their ease in a softly shaded luxurious library, filled with unread books in half-calf. Polished mahogany, heavy damask curtains, thick, soft carpets, scent of mignonette and roses, all added to its comfort.

"I want to talk about all sorts of things," returned Estelle, in answer to her friend's question. "Interesting things—things that matter—yourself for instance! I wonder why it is that so few people talk interestingly about ordinary things! I believe it must be because they simply will not tell the truth about them; they stick to platitudes for fear of blundering on some thought they feel they oughtn't to have. Don't you think that is it? Now we always look things right in the face and say just what we think about them; and that is why we're so queer—and so

nice—and so interesting to one another. And this is such a good opportunity for a talk. We've had such a lovely dinner—wasn't that soup delicious? and, as for that muscatel! Don't you simply dote on things to eat? I do. I never agree with that man—Solomon, wasn't it?—who said that he would rather have a dinner of herbs and peace than a stalled ox and strife therewith. Let him have the herbs! and give me the stalled ox every time. If it were nicely served and properly cooked I wouldn't care if there were seven bad-tempered married couples and sixteen cross cats and twenty squalling parrots all rowing together at my elbow. That's what it is to be practical. Give me things to eat and a good appetite and I don't care much what happens. There's something about a dinner which appeals to me in a way that sunsets and sonatas don't. And yet some one described me the other day as being 'spirituelle.' Fancy!"

"Some one who didn't know you very well, evidently."

"Some one who has called me 'Estelle' all his life except the four years of it when I wasn't born; but, as you say, some one who doesn't know me very well because he happens to be a man and a man who used to be in love with me. Poor thing! And yet he's happy in his way and I'm happy in mine. He has his ideals and I have my dinners. The only really happy people are the people who have the sense to prefer dinners to ideals and who steadily set to work to get them."

"I suppose you are happy. If dinners could make anyone happy you ought to be. But, tell me, Del, do you never want anything else?"

"Oh, yes. I want silk dresses and diamond brooches and the feeling that every snob in town will kow-tow as soon as my snub nose appears. And I've got them all—thank goodness! I very easily might not have, you know. There are so many others looking out for just the opportunity I seized. And every one said that Henry wasn't a marrying man. Ridiculous! As if every one wasn't a marrying man as soon as the right woman came along; the woman who made love to him unremittingly and tactfully without letting him see that she was doing it. It was an awful bore, sometimes, to make love to Henry. It had to be done so carefully. O dear, he was so surly and snubby and so scared of being hooked. But it didn't do any good: *I intended to marry him and I married him*—and so could you if you had any gumption!" she exclaimed, veering around and fixing Lynn with a look of intense determination.

"What? Marry Henry?"

"Not my Henry, no; but some other Henry. There are plenty of them and if you don't take them somebody else will. They all like to be admired and courted. And oh, lucky girl! Fate has dropped an ideal Henry right in your lap."

"Don't, Del! My poor lap! And as for 'ideal,' why, he has green teeth and goggly eyes."

"I am sure you are not so good-looking, yourself."

"Now, Del! Have I goggly eyes and green teeth? Let us be accurate before we are aggravating. Besides, it was horrid of me to speak of his appearance. Only his appearance is so exactly like him that it grates on me, some way."

"He is a great deal too good for you," said her friend, indignantly.

"So every one has already told me. Anything is too good for an old, ugly school-teacher, I dare say; but I don't want him, even if he is too good for me."

"Now, Lynn, we'll talk this over. I want to have the whole thing out with you."

"As you please."

"Very well, then. We will assume that you are quite determined not to marry Lighton. Two other courses are open to you; the first, to go on teaching all your life; the second, to marry some one else. We will examine these two alternatives—with your permission."

"Or without it!"

"Or, as you say, without it. Let us begin then. We will suppose that you stay as you are and go on teaching. You are not at all young, now—you needn't grin. I know I am two years older, but that has nothing to do with it; I'm married. You are not, I repeat, young. Every year you become a little older and a little older."

"The truth of your remarks is only equalled by their unpleasantness."

"I don't care. You go on getting older and older. Your aunt, who has been good to you and of whom you are fond, will be very much disappointed in you. She feels that it is disgraceful not to marry and criminal not to marry Lighton, and I am strongly inclined to agree with her. So, as the years go by and you get older and plainer and less desirable your aunt will grow less and less fond of you. You are not a great favourite with your uncle; to be sure, he has only one supreme favourite in the universe and I needn't say who that is!—and your aunt will probably die in time. What a happy home you will have, then! Suppose on the other hand, that he should die. You wouldn't have money enough to live in that big house and you would have to be cooped up in a flat and come home, after teaching all day, to listen to your aunt's lamentations about the nice establishment you might have had"—

"Thank fortune there are always the poison and the dagger."

"There are; but they're the refuge of the coward, and ordinary respectable people don't commit suicide, however much they want to. Now, having fully disposed of that alternative, let us turn to the other—that you marry some one else. Who else is there? You are a general favourite and lots of men like to talk to you; but who, besides Lighton, is in love with you? I mean of course, that is in a position to marry. We will suppose, though, that you have several other proposals in the next few years—what then? Whom would you rather marry?"

Lynn said nothing and turned her head away.

"The fact is that there is no one you would rather marry and there are very few who could offer you what he does. The trouble with you is that you don't face things. You know that, if you don't marry him, you have nothing in life to look forward to; yet, because it isn't an ideal arrangement, you refuse to consider it. Surely you have outgrown the silly, pretty, childish idea of marrying for love? Look at the people who do marry for love! How many of them are as happy as I am? I, who deliberately angled to catch the richest man of my acquaintance and did it. You could not have managed matters for yourself in the way that I did; and then, Fate, instead of punishing you for being stupid, offers you a prize—and you throw it away. Why?"

"It is a little hard to explain why, Del," returned her friend, slowly. "I don't know whether I could make you understand."

"I don't know that I have much heart, Lynn, but I have a mind. Try me."

"Long ago, then, I 'faced things' as you call it. I looked right at them hard and baldly and I saw that Life is very hard on woman. Life, Society—even Nature—all seem to be leagued against her. Her one chance of happiness is to make a happy marriage; and in order to make a happy marriage how many things are needed—and how few are forthcoming! Even then she must make up her mind to face certain torture and possible death; and when, after bearing two or three children, she loses her youth, her strength, her good looks, she has the satisfaction of knowing that her husband is as attractive as he was the day she married him. So, practically, in the majority of cases, she has nothing but her children. I am not thinking of you, you monkey; you are a great exception. Of course the children must be worth a great deal to her, but, apart from them, the average woman has precious little. Her husband is usually fond of her—I am speaking, now, of happy marriages—but all the idealism and the romance die very quickly. If, on the other hand, she does as so many do and marries some one who is in love with her but for whom she cares little—what then? All the usual hindrances and no compensations. There is left only spinsterhood. Putting aside the lucky few who have some art, some profession, which means everything to them, unmarried women are, as you have said, simply incumbrances and not happy incumbrances at that. The one happy thing for a woman is to fall in love when she is young, marry some one who adores her, and become so absorbed in her children that she won't mind the rest. Of course there are a few ideal marriages here and there; cases where people fall in love and stay in love and have satisfactory children and enjoy life; but you know as well as I do how many of these there are. Four altogether; and I have sometimes doubted the fourth."

"Well, of all the cynics"—

"Not a bit of it; I don't cherish useless illusions in the face of facts, that's all.

Well, as I began to say, long ago I 'faced things' and saw them as they were. The best thing to do was to fall in love and make a happy marriage; that I couldn't do. The next was to marry some one I didn't want, or to do something that would support me, and remain unmarried. Of the two, the last seemed the only possible thing. I can get along for the present just as I am and I do not look into the future. As far as I can see, it is bound to be a wretched one, anyway; but I may die—a thousand things may happen. In the meantime I do not worry because of realizing that life is a tragic thing; and I take things very coolly and don't make a fuss about anything that can't be helped. When I feel down in the mouth I always console myself with the reflection, first, that it can't last forever; and, secondly, that however industriously Fate may knock me, she can't compel me to squeal about it."

"What a truly cheerful and comforting reflection."

"Well, do you know anyone more cheerful than I?"

"No, I can't say that I do; but appearances are certainly deceptive. Then you really prefer unmarried unhappiness to married unhappiness—that is your final choice?"

"That is my final choice."

"It is an extraordinary one, that is all I can say, when one thinks of all the money that is thrown in with the married unhappiness."

"Money can't buy happiness."

"No, but it can buy some mighty good substitutes for it, my dear. And as far as I can see, you are not going to get anything at all with the unmarried unhappiness."

"Nothing at all? Freedom, a peaceful mind and an independent income. I'd rather have my liberty than all the houses in Christendom and all the men. Of course I am human; I should prefer to make a happy marriage; but how many people do, and why should I be picked out for a happy fate when so many kinder and better people than I have nothing but trouble from beginning to end of their lives? No; I complain of nothing."

"Don't you think you will be sorry for this, some day?"

"If I am, no one will ever know it."

"If you think all this about your future, why do you want to live?"

"I don't want to live. Do you? Does any mature person? But I must live and so must you. There is probably some reason for the world and for Nature and for Sin and for all the other queer works of God and of the Devil. Perhaps we shall find it all out some day and then again perhaps we shall sleep so soundly that we shall not care to find out anything at all. That would be nice. It would be still nicer, though, to find out that everything was for the best, really, and that everything about the world was necessary. 'God's in his heaven, all's right with

the world,' you know, and all that sort of thing. That phrase about the 'best of all possible worlds,' when applied to this, is such rubbish and such inhuman rubbish at that; such an insult to the intelligence and humanity of mankind; yet one can't help hoping that there will be a 'best of all possible worlds' and the mere fact that we want it and look forward to it so instinctively shows that there must be one, somewhere, I think. What do you think?"

"I think I should like to have a brandy and soda," said Mrs. Hadwell, forlornly. "Positively you have given me the blues. I do hate thinking of heaven and poets and metaphysics and things. This earth is all right if you only have sense. The trouble is, you haven't any. Oh! I have just thought of something. I have a lovely box of Huyler's that I haven't touched. We'll eat that and Thomas shall light us a little fire and you can have the latest magazine and I'll read the book of that woman's—you know! the one that they are making all the fuss about. It's frightfully amusing and very improper and it doesn't make one think the least little bit. That's the sort of book I like, and it's the sort of book most people like, too, only they won't say so. Yes, it is, Lynn. You needn't say it isn't. Else why is it always out at the library, though they have seven copies, and why is its author able to travel all over the world on her earnings? You don't understand human nature. All it wants is to be amused and *not* to be improved. We all like to slide down hill, comfortably, without being obliged to climb up again. And we would all slide down much faster if it wasn't that the company at the foot of the hill is so unpleasant and the people at the top throw things at you and you can't throw them back. And the reason that the people at the top throw things is that they are so cross because they don't really like being stuck up there and they have to pretend they do."

"Well, you're not at all cross, yet, Del, and you haven't slid down hill very fast," said Lynn, laughing.

"Oh, yes, I have. Anyway I didn't have far to slide from. I began pretty low down, you know. Oh, I have no illusions about myself. But, even so I have slidden. But you see, if you are clad in gold armour, you can slide as much as you like; for that renders you bullet-proof. If I were a nursery-governess slaving over spoilt brats for the sake of getting a miserable living, I should be thought a very shady character. Just suppose I had said what I said just now about only liking improper things that didn't make me think! Why, I should be turned out of doors without a character, I suppose. But I am Mrs. Henry Hadwell and so I can slide just as much as I please—within limits. Perhaps it is just as well that there are limits to everything. Otherwise I dare say I should be even worse than I am. And I'm pretty bad, you know. I haven't any conscience and very little affection. And I have *no* ideals. But then, as I said before, I have dinners—lovely dinners! How glad I am to think that I am going to have another one to-morrow.

Some way, when I think of that, I quite forget all the horrid things you have put into my head to-night. Just think! I—*I* might have been a nursery-governess. *I!* I hadn't brains or industry enough to become a teacher. Ugh! Oh, what horrible lives there are in the world and how lovely to think that I have a lovely home and a doting husband and three darling children *and* my dinners! What are you thinking about, now?"

"I was just thinking that we were awfully like the lower animals, really," replied Lynn, with a half-laugh. "A little more complex, but just about like them, otherwise. What does the average bear want? A mate, cubs,—and dinners. If he gets them he is happy; if he doesn't, he is miserable. If Bob could talk, he would say just about what you have been saying, now."

"Bob is a sensible dog," said Mrs. Hadwell, solemnly. "I don't like dogs and I do like you but justice compels me to state that Bob has a lot more sense than you have. Never mind! you will get wise when it is too late and then you will wish that you had had the sense to imitate me and Bob and all the other practical people in the world. You needn't think I mind being called a lower animal. If being a lower animal means getting what you want and being a higher animal means getting what you don't want,—well, I want to be a lower animal, thank you! Lynn! these marron glaces are simply the most delicious things you ever thought of. *Do* have one!"

CHAPTER XIII
REJECTED ADDRESSES

"The Heart's Desire hath led me
In barren lands and vain."
—Theodosia Garrison.

"I suppose it sounds brutal to say so," said Lynn Thayer, "but you know you ought really to be very grateful to me for refusing you. You will thank me for it, ten years hence."

Mr. Harold Lighton, who was sitting opposite, frowned angrily and made no response.

"We are not in the least suited to one another," she continued, gently. "You—

I would make you very unhappy. You are young and rich, and when you get over this, you will be able to marry some nice, young, pretty girl."

"I don't want a nice, young, pretty girl," returned Mr. Lighton, glumly. "I want you."

Lynn's eyes suddenly danced but she very properly refrained from comment.

"Oh, I say, won't you think this over?" burst forth Mr. Lighton, quite unconscious of the doubtful compliment he had just paid the object of his affections. "I'm most awfully in love with you, indeed I am. You know that, don't you?"

"I know that you think you are in love with me, just now," answered Lynn, gravely. "But, in my twenty-eight years of life, quite a few people have told me that they were in love with me and would never be happy without me. And they have married some one else in a few years' time and have never thought of me, again."

"I'm not like that," said Mr. Lighton, eagerly. "Upon my soul, I'm not. You may think I'm fickle or easily suited. I'm not. I don't like anybody but you and I never will. It seems pretty hard when a fellow's waited until over thirty before he has run across any one he fancied—and then to be turned down, after all."

"It has happened before."

"Why, no, it hasn't!" said Lighton, indignantly.

"I mean to other people."

"Oh! See here, why won't you have me? I suppose I'm not clever enough for you. Is that the trouble?"

"No, no indeed. I'm stupid, myself, frightfully stupid in lots of ways. That isn't it, at all. It's just that I don't care enough about you."

Mr. Lighton regarded her with some perplexity.

"I say—I'd like awfully to say something if you won't think it rude."

"Very well—what is it?"

"You're twenty-eight—you don't mind my mentioning it, do you?" queried Mr. Lighton, tactfully. "You've always spoken so openly of it, yourself."

"Oh, I can never keep even the most damaging facts about myself hidden," said Lynn, solemnly.

"Eh?—what's that? Oh, well, never mind! What I wanted to say was this: Don't you mean to marry?"

"I haven't quite made up my mind, yet. Perhaps I may marry somebody a few years hence—but not you," she hastily added, seeing Mr. Lighton look up with sudden interest.

"Why not me?"

"I have told you twenty times over why not."

"And you're serious about it? You're sure you won't change your mind?

Well, what I wanted to say was this. Suppose, a few years hence when you've decided that you will marry—now, you won't be offended?"

"I don't think I will. What you want to say is, what will I do if no one wants to marry me, then?"

"Yes," confessed Mr. Lighton, looking a little embarrassed but sticking to his guns, manfully. "You're an awfully stunning girl, but a girl often doesn't get another offer after thirty; and what if you don't?"

"I won't marry."

"But—but"—

"I won't marry, anyway, unless I see some one I like better than I do you," said Lynn, deliberately. "It is best to be explicit, isn't it? I don't want to hurt you, but this is the plain truth of the matter. The idea of marrying just for the sake of being called 'Mrs.' doesn't appeal to me, at all; and I could not marry you for any other reason. Oh yes, of course I might marry you for the sake of living in a nice house and getting my clothes in Paris; but I don't care much about that, either. You see what I mean?"

"Oh, yes, I see. I thought, some way—you see I have a fairly good income and you're fond of horses"—

"You thought I might marry you for the pleasure of seeing something of your horses; is that it?"

"Oh, I say, Miss Thayer, let up! It's bad enough to be refused without being made game of."

"I suppose it is," said Lynn, slowly. She looked at him as though a new idea had occurred to her. "I wonder why you want to marry me," she said at last.

"Why I want to marry you?"

"Yes. I'm not very young, I'm not at all pretty and I have no money. It seems a most curious thing that you should have taken this violent fancy to me. Why did you? Do you know?"

"I say! you *are* a queer girl."

"In other words I'm not a sheep," returned Lynn, composedly. "Don't you think most people are very like sheep? They travel in flocks and all bleat in unison at the same things and get up in the morning and eat and drink and go to sleep, again—and, in time, they die. I suppose they might as well be doing that as something else, but if it amuses me to do something else, why shouldn't I? Now, for instance, if I had been a well-regulated, conventional sheep I should have bleated out, 'Oh, Mr. Lighton, this is so sudden!' and then I should have thought lovingly of your good house and your nice furniture and should have simpered and accepted you. But, not being a sheep, I want to know why on earth you did it."

"Because I—like you so awfully," explained Mr. Lighton, eagerly.

"But why on earth should you like me?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Lighton, doubtfully. "Why does any one like you?" he inquired, brightening. "You've had lots of other chaps."

"Oh, but that's different. You see I'm a man's woman by instinct and training. I do my very utmost to please and be nice to every man I meet except you; and the consequence is that they all like me and the ones who like me enough to call on me, often, usually end by proposing: not because I'm so remarkably attractive but for the reason that a man, for some occult reason, cannot see much of a woman without proposing to her."

"I say! You're gassing!"

"I'm not. But the queer thing is that you took this fancy to me at the very start without any help whatever from me."

"What a funny girl you are to give yourself away like that. Girls generally say that they don't encourage anybody."

"Yes, but, as you remarked, I am a funny girl; I tell the truth, sometimes. How do you suppose a plain, poor person like me would ever have had so many men friends if she hadn't done something? It's wonderful," said Lynn, meditatively, "wonderful! how easy it is to fascinate men. Just look at each man and talk to him as if you thought he was the most handsome, brilliant and fascinating creature extant—and the thing is done! The man doesn't live who can resist it."

"Ha, ha! you *are* funny."

"Yes. I can remember when I was a young girl that I used to be terribly afraid that no one would ever fall in love with me because I was so ugly. I used to wish so that I had curling eyelashes and rose-leaf complexions and things: and, lo and behold! before I was eighteen the great beautiful truth dawned upon me. Just let a man talk about himself until he is black in the face and he will never tire of your society, no matter what you look like. Nothing else is necessary. A man thinks any eyes gazing admiringly into his are beautiful eyes: he considers any voice that murmurs timely flatteries in his good right ear a sweet voice: and any woman with intelligence enough to laugh heartily at his stale jokes and listen respectfully to his dull anecdotes, has all the intelligence that any female needs, in his opinion. So there you are. Having this knowledge, what else did I lack? I promptly became a belle of the first water and have remained so for ten years. Pretty girls have lost their beauty, rich girls have lost their money, lively girls have lost their vivacity; but I remain perennially attractive because I have grasped the great truth that every man prefers himself to anything else on earth and, next to himself, admires the woman who acts as though she agreed with him. I'm in a candid mood to-night, am I not, Mr. Lighton? What is the matter? you don't look very happy."

"I can't help wondering," confessed Mr. Lighton, rather ruefully, "why, if

you're so fond of having men like you, you've never been nicer to me."

"Because," she returned, slowly, "I very soon received the impression that you were more or less in earnest. Now my puppy days have passed and I take no pleasure in causing pain; and it must be more or less painful to want some one who doesn't care anything about you. So I thought it best to be flippant and unpleasant in the hope that you would get disgusted. Why didn't you?"

"I—I don't know"—

"Yes, I've been most hateful," continued Lynn, thoughtfully. "I wonder if it would do any good if I were to tell you all the harsh things I've said about you to Aunt Lucy."

"I don't think," said Mr. Lighton, hastily and firmly, "that it would do a bit of good."

"Then I won't. But will you tell me just as a matter of curiosity—what it was that you liked about me?"

"In the first place," her companion said, pondering, "I suppose I liked you because you didn't chase me and it was such a change. You see when a fellow has a good position and money coming to him"— He wiped his forehead and looked scared and reminiscent.

"I see," exclaimed Lynn. "I must make a note of that. There are men who tire of being 'chased.' Then there must be men who tire of tobacco, I suppose."

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Lighton, dubiously. "You see, when one has smoked long enough, one can always throw one's cigar out of the window. So one doesn't get as sick of it as one does of women."

"No, I suppose not. I never thought of that," said Lynn, gravely. "Well, let me see! you liked me in the first place because I didn't 'chase' you: and why did you like me, in the second?"

"You're a fine sport," said Mr. Lighton, pondering, "you're always ready for any thing, and you dance like a streak, and you're never tired, and you do make a fellow roar so. I suppose that's why."

"So these are my assets. Dancing like a 'streak'—whatever that may be: always being ready to skate and toboggan: and 'making a fellow roar so.' It doesn't sound attractive: however I never pretended to understand men. What a funny thing it is! No money, no beauty, no particular brains and one of the most eligible young men in the city begging me to marry him!"

"Your aunt likes me," said Mr. Lighton.

"She likes you very much; but she always confuses you with the new plumbing and the electric lights in your house. She can't conceive how I can withstand such fascinations. Poor Aunt Lucy! I wish I were a little more satisfactory: but I really cannot fall in love to order even to please her—not with a whole galaxy of electric lights."

"I don't know exactly what you're driving at," said Mr. Lighton, looking sullen, "but I think your aunt's a very sensible woman."

"So do I. I only wish I were half as sensible. I'm a great grief to her. You see, she feels rightly that a single woman with no independent income should struggle valiantly to avert the awful doom of old maid. Now, the deeper I sink in the mire of old-maiden-hood, the less I struggle."

"Is your aunt very fond of you?" asked Mr. Lighton curiously.

"No. She is much pleased at my popularity, which she doesn't understand in the least, and she regards it in the light of a personal reward for her goodness in adopting me. That is all."

"And your uncle? You don't mind my asking, do you?"

"Not a bit. My uncle hates me, but he thinks I'm a good girl and tries not to show it more than he can help. You see he can't endure children and he is prejudiced against me because I was a child when he first knew me and he has never forgotten it."

"Then I suppose you're not awfully fond of them?"

"I am—most grateful to them, both: but I do not love them. I have never really loved but one person in my life—no, two. The first love is much stronger than the second: but the second is—profound and lasting. I am not an affectionate person: I do not suppose that there will ever be more than just those two."

"Neither of them's me," interposed Mr. Lighton, gloomily and ungrammatically.

"Neither of them's you, no," returned Lynn, firmly.

"Oh, look here, Miss Thayer, can't you reconsider it? I'm—I'm most awfully in love with you, upon my word I am: and—and, after all,—I don't like to say this exactly—but you know I can give you everything you want and—don't you like the idea of having a little money?"

"Immensely."

"Then"——

"But, unfortunately I do *not* like the idea of having you. There is the plain English of it. I don't want to hurt your feelings, but there doesn't seem to be any way of making you understand."

"Oh, I understand, all right!" muttered Mr. Lighton, ruefully. "But I can't say I'm pleased. You might have given me a hint before letting me make a fool of myself."

"A hint! Man! how many hints have I given you?"

"A dev—I mean a great many," returned the consistent Mr. Lighton. "But I thought you were trying to draw me on."

"I have no talents for man-hunting," said Lynn, rather crossly. "I never try to 'draw people on' or anything like that. It does not amuse me: I'm a man's

woman in one sense but I am not a flirt"——

"Flirt! You can't flirt any more tha—than that mantelpiece," said Mr. Lighton, desperately. "But I like you—I can't help liking you, some way."

"No—I suppose you can't—not just at present, anyway. But you'll get over it in time."

Mr. Lighton said nothing, but his face was not cheerful.

"I have a good mind," said Lynn, slowly, "to tell you something about myself—something that will show you the hopelessness of asking me. It is this: even if I liked you very much I couldn't marry you."

"But why?"

"Because—because I have a duty to perform; a duty which demands all my time and strength and—and thought; and which marriage would interfere with."

"But—but do you mean that you are going to perform this duty—whatever it may be—all your life?"

"N-n-no. In a few years—perhaps sooner—it will be—finished."

"And then?"

"And then—oh, don't talk about it! I was foolish to speak about it, anyway—but, do you know, I felt sorry for you. I can't understand why people like having proposals from people they don't want to marry. It always seems to me such a pity that anything should be wasted, that any feeling should burn itself out, without result. That may be a queer way to look at it—but I suppose I am queer. People seem to think so and, perhaps, they are right."

"Well, I'd better go, I suppose," said Lighton, gruffly, after a short pause. "If anything turns up—I mean, if you should change your mind, you know, or anything like that—why"—

"Thank you; but I never shall. Good-night, Mr. Lighton. I'm sorry, really I am. It all seems too bad, but you know it's not my fault."

Left to herself, she drew a long sigh; then rose and moved about the room mechanically straightening the furniture and patting the sofa cushions. Finally she leaned her elbows on the mantelpiece and gazed earnestly into the mirror, above. "Curious what he sees in me!" she said, slowly. "Curious what anyone sees in me! I have nothing to recommend me in the way of looks; it is hard to understand. In spite of all that I have done for—for the boy, he—he doesn't really care very much about me, even now. And yet this man—whom I have done everything to discourage"—

She stared slowly at herself: then turned away.

"Time to go to bed," she said, reluctantly. "And high time to stop—

thinking.... Oh, Liol, Liol, Liol!"

CHAPTER XIV
A DECISION TO BE REACHED

"'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own."
—Browning.

Mr. Albert and Miss Bertha Hadwell having arrived at Hadwell Heights their aunt had promptly issued invitations for the "bridge" of which she had spoken at her "tea." Hadwell Heights was "en fête." The guests had arrived and were playing, busily, though not for money. Apart from the fact that the guests of honour were young, Mrs. Hadwell disapproved of "bridge-gambling."

"I never win at games," she confided to Lynn. "And I don't enjoy losing money even if I can afford it. And it's such a nice, cheap way of getting a reputation for steadiness and sobriety and high morality and all that. I love to be known for things that I haven't even a bowing acquaintance with. And it seems so delicious to say with a perfectly straight face, 'No, I never play for money. I don't approve of it.' It seems such a rebuke to the worldly-minded and the frivolous and all that lot."

Mrs. Hadwell, though, might be depended upon to furnish very pretty prizes. Besides which her house was famed for its delightful entertainments of all descriptions. For which reasons, and for several others, her pretty drawing-room was thronged.

Lynn Thayer had refused to play, offering to bear her hostess company, however, and to help her in any way she could. She sat now in an alcove of the great old-fashioned bay-window, watching the players absently, and trying to straighten out several matters which threatened to become hopelessly entangled in her mind. This was hardly the place to solve these problems, but, as they became daily and hourly more imminent, she felt that she might as well face them at one time as at another, so far as she was able.

Her reflections chimed oddly with the scraps of conversation which were wafted to her ears from time to time.

"What shall I say if Gerald does ask me to marry him?" she thought, her face darkening. "How can I accept him? And then again—how can I refuse him? If he would only wait—but it is not reasonable to suppose that he would. How can I—how shall I answer him?"

"We-ll," interposed a voice, faintly, "I make it diamonds."

"Oh, why, Mrs. Hall?"

"Oh, did you have a good suit? Oh, dear! well, never mind!—I suppose we can't take it back, can we?—no? well, I suppose not. That's the worst of"—

"He must have meant that; he can't have meant anything else. Of course I have always known, but I thought I could keep it off a little longer. And I didn't realize till lately how much it would mean to me if—I can't give him up. No, I can't give him up. Yet how can I do anything else under the circumstances? Could I explain in any way—give him any inkling of my position? no, I don't see how"—

"Oh, are we playing 'no trumps'? Why, I didn't know that. Why didn't you tell me when you saw me playing out my king and ace"—

"He has no idea—naturally it will seem incomprehensible to him if I say that I do care for him but that I can't marry him for years. If I were five years younger; but, even so—no, I cannot say that. What can I say? If I ask him to trust me and to let me tell him when I shall be free to give him my answer—no, the case is hopeless. I had better tell him baldly and plainly that it is impossible for me to marry—and then?"—

"Not at all, Mrs. Willing, not at all. Of course it was my trick already but I saw that you hadn't noticed that—why, don't think of it for a moment. Of course, generally speaking, it *isn't* supposed to be a good thing to trump your partner's trick, but"—

"He is not the sort of man to let it rest there; he will ask questions, all sorts of questions, he will insist on knowing what I mean, what I intend to do. How will it end? The only thing that he can never think of is the truth. He will think of everything else under the sun. Oh, the thing is too hopeless! I shall have to let him think that I don't care for him—oh, but if I do that he will go away, I shall not see him again; in time he will marry some one else—how could I bear that? He must not go. I'll say anything, anything, short of giving my secret away. Ah, that horrible oath! So needless, so useless! and to think that, on top of all the rest, this should come! and that I may be compelled to give up my only chance of happiness in the future. I won't give it up! I won't! Life is too cruel. I'll do anything to prevent him leaving me. And then there is not only my pain if he did—but he would suffer, too. No, it is not to be thought of for a moment. He must stay."

"Well, I suppose I really shouldn't have thrown away my ace when hearts

hadn't been played at all, but then you know I never stick to rules."

"If only he hadn't written that note, asking to see me to-night. If only I could have put off answering him a little longer. If I refuse to let him go home with me it will be equivalent to refusing him, altogether. It is out of the question. I must settle it one way or another at once. What is it to be?"

"Oh, don't tell me the queen hasn't been played, yet? Why, I thought it was out ages ago—oh, I really think I ought to have that back"—

"What will he say when I answer him—that is, if I tell him the truth? How will it sound? 'I do care for you but I can't marry you just now, perhaps not for several years, I can't say exactly when.' The thing is incredible. A woman of my age, presumably sane, to answer a proposal of marriage in that fashion. Ah, if only I were indifferent to him how easy things would be; and yet what would I have then in life? When Liol—dies—oh, I can't think of that! Where is he to-night, I wonder? What is he doing? Liol, Liol! if only you were dead! and yet, oh, I can't wish that. What will my life be when he is gone? Gone! Think of it! How can I marry, then? what will my life be worth? how shall I live and hide my grief? oh, Liol, Liol!"

"Upon my word, Mr. Coote! where were your eyes? Didn't you know that the nine of clubs wasn't out?"

"One thing is certain; much as I love Gerald, nothing and nobody can ever be to me what Liol was and is. Is that very strange? am I entirely different to all other girls. How could any strange man, however dear, be as much in your life as a person like Liol, with whom your very heart-strings were entwined; who came when your heart was empty and filled it? My Lionel! my little brother! my last charge from my dead mother! Oh, if the years could only be wiped out and if I could see him again as he once was, the same sweet dear child, how happily I could die—yes, how happily I could give up everything—Gerald, everything. But—I must live; and Lionel is—oh, I can't say, I can't think what he is; and he is dying by inches; and there is only one other person in the world for whom I care, only one other person for whom I ever shall care but him; and I may have to give him up. If only Lionel didn't need me so; if only he didn't need all my money, all my thought, all my care—imagine my deserting him and starting to choose a trousseau. A trousseau! when any day he may need a shroud."

"A penny for your thoughts, Lynn."

Mrs. Hadwell had come up, unnoticed and was standing at Lynn's side.

"Did I startle you?" she asked, brightly. "You were looking straight in front of you like Cassandra or Joan of Arc or some other unpleasant historical character. What was it? Indigestion?"

"A fit of the blues, perhaps," said Lynn. "Don't mind me, Del. It was most ungrateful of me to cast a shade over the festivities and, to tell you the truth, I

wasn't aware that I was doing it. Who has the highest score?"

"Erma Reed, so far. Isn't she a beauty? Lynn, what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing, silly!—that is, nothing much. You know we all get a little despondent at times."

"But not you, that is, not until lately. What has come over you?"

"Age, I suppose."

"If you don't want to confide in me, don't—"

"I don't!"

—"But I think it's most unkind, when I always tell you everything."

"There's nothing that I can confide in you, silly-billy!" said Lynn, rousing herself and speaking with forced cheerfulness. "Nothing in the world. Now, will that satisfy you? You know practically all my affairs except those which concern other people and which I have promised not to tell."

"Is that true?"

"There is just one thing which I might tell you—but, after all, it's nothing to tell"—

"Oh, what is it?"

"A man—but this is silly for there is really nothing to tell and, anyway, I don't want to discuss it."

"How logical you are," said Mrs. Hadwell, calmly. "But I know all about that, so you needn't bother. He is going to propose to-night, he told me so. And he begged me to make sure that he wasn't deputed to take anyone else home, as you had not answered his note and so he couldn't be sure"—

"He told you! How queer! How very unlike him!"

"I skated with him to-day and we had tea together. And you know how I can always make any man tell me the inmost secret of his heart if I can once get him alone for five minutes. And you're the inmost core of his."

"Del!"

"He as good as told me so. And I promised to put in a good word for him. So this is the good word. If you *will* be so foolish as to refuse Lighton—who is, by far, the better match of the two—why, you might do worse than Amherst."

"Thank you."

"But I can't help hoping, of course, that you will never be so foolish as to refuse Lighton."

"Mr. Amherst would be delighted if he could only hear your warm advocacy of his cause."

"Oh, I told him what I was going to say. I was perfectly frank. But I felt constrained to admit that you were such a hopeless idiot that I was very much afraid that you were going to refuse Lighton, if you had not done so, already. However, as I said, you were quite capable of committing the lesser idiocy of

refusing him, afterwards. I don't know that I was quite so nice a confidante as usual; but then you must remember that Gerald Amherst absolutely refused to sanction my efforts at flirtation with him, this fall, and you can't expect me to forgive that all at once. I told him that, too."

"Del!"

"Oh, he's a good sort. He said that, once you accepted him, his mind would be free and, if I would then renew my attentions, he would accept them most gratefully—always provided you didn't kick. Well, he didn't put it just that way, but that was his meaning. Only he didn't mean a word of it. Lynn, if ever a man was hopelessly enamoured of a woman, you are that woman. You're doing pretty well, all things considered. Two proposals in one winter and one a good catch—a *particularly* good catch—don't glare so, Lynn, it's rude! and the other an extremely nice man and not too poor, either. My goodness! but you ought to be thankful. Look at the way some people work and work and then don't get much at the end; and here you just sit with hands folded, so to speak, and watch the desirables canter in. At your age, too! only you mustn't dally any longer, you know; it's time to make up your mind."

"Yes, you're right. It's high time I made up my mind."

"Good. Now then, make it up."

"My dear, my mind isn't like a bed that can be made up while you wait. I must think a bit."

"What do you want to think about, I should like to know? Are you weakening on the idea of refusing Lighton?"

"No. To tell you the truth—I may just as well tell you, I suppose—I've refused him, already."

"*What*? When? Where? No, never mind telling me, either. Let's stick to the point. Now that you have refused him, there is only one thing left to do—marry Amherst and thank your stars that he proposed just when he did. Otherwise, everyone would say that Lighton had neglected to 'come up to scratch.' Gracious! how fortunate that you had two strings to your bow."

"You know that old proverb about 'falling between two stools,' don't you?" Lynn asked, smiling faintly.

"Yes, and it's perfect rubbish. The people who talk about 'falling between two stools' are the people who've never had but one stool in their lives and who've sat firmly down on that to prevent it getting up and running away. Two stools, indeed! Twenty, if you can get them! But two will do very nicely indeed, when they are two like these. One being gone, you grab the other just as quickly as you know how. Now don't stop to tell me that I am getting vulgar; practical people always seem vulgar to visionaries. The question is, what are you going to say to Amherst to-night?"

"I'm not going to say anything, Del, for I simply can't let him take me home. I must have a little more time to think. No, don't argue; I am serious. Tell him that I am frightfully tired—which is literally true—and that you have asked me to spend the night here; but that, if he will be so good as to take me home after the hockey match to-morrow night, I shall be eternally obliged. Or no, don't put it like that; say that—oh well, say what you think best, Del, you always know how to put these things. Really I am so tired that I simply can't think to-night. Will you arrange it for me? and you won't mind putting me up for the night, will you?"

"No, dear child, I shall be delighted to have you. And I'll give him the message though I think you are foolish to postpone the thing. But I won't tease you, for I am sure you are going to be sensible in the end; and we won't talk any more about it if you don't want to. See here, do look at that table! and please listen to the conversation between Agatha and that unfortunate wretch of a Haldern. I know who won't be Agatha's 'latest.' *Do* listen."

"But—excuse me for asking, Miss Ladilaw—but what did you make it 'no trumps' on?" inquired a masculine voice.

"Why—why—why, I'll tell you, Mr. Haldern," said Agatha looking up at him, confidingly. "My own hand was so perfectly awful—so appalling—that I felt sure Dummy must have a lot of aces and things. But you see it didn't."

"But, in that case, why didn't you leave it to me?"

"Because I—I was *so* afraid that you would make it spades. And I had quite good diamonds."

"But don't you see?"—

"Oh, I *always* believe in trusting something to Dummy," Agatha interrupted gently but with an air of finality. "Don't let us discuss it any further, Mr. Haldern."

"Del," whispered Lynn to her hostess, "I may not be very kind-hearted, but I would not inflict Agatha on any man."

"Oh, they'll change partners at the next table. And I think it's good for men to play with Agatha: they appreciate the next partner they get so much more than they otherwise would. Well, Lynn, how do you like my twins?"

"Charming; and they do seem to enjoy everything so. Did they only get here to-day? They look so cheerful and fresh. I thought they would probably want to rest, the first evening; but they seem to be enjoying it."

"Yes. They're nineteen. At nineteen one enjoys everything but rest. I knew that and so I determined to start in without a moment's delay. I'm perfectly delighted with them, myself. I don't see how in the world that old curmudgeon of a brother of Henry's ever contrived to have two such good-looking, good-humoured children. And their names are so cute—Bert and Bertie; and the likeness is something extraordinary."

It was. Lynn, who had elected to remain outside the game and keep her hostess company, glanced from the cosy corner where she was ensconced to a table in the middle of the room where Miss Bertha Hadwell was sitting: then a little further on to where Mr. Albert Hadwell was scooping up tricks with a dexterity which bespoke long practice. The boy was slightly, very slightly taller than the girl; but, apart from that, one might have fancied that one was the other's double. The same olive cheeks, slightly tinged with rose-red: the same impish, restless dark eyes: the same long, thin mouth, ever parting to show gleaming, irregular white teeth.

They were an attractive pair: and Lynn's eyes rested on them for several moments before they wandered slowly over the rest of the room. The usual company was present: the pretty girl who never counted the tricks and continually appealed to her partner to tell her "what was trumps"; the stout woman who remembered everything and berated her confrère soundly if he forgot the thirteenth card; the mild-looking man who smiled sweetly as his lady partners trumped his tricks and cursed them bitterly on his way home; the pompous man who never failed to instruct all the rest of the table; the excitable debutante who invariably dropped the wrong card on the trick, then shrieked aloud and sought permission to "take it back" on the ground that she "hadn't been thinking"; and, last but not least, the bad-tempered man who regarded bridge as a religion, and burned to slay the sacrilegious ones who violated its tenets.

"Oh, Lynn," whispered Mrs. Hadwell with a sigh of contentment, "aren't people a treat? I wonder if they're getting hungry. Do you think I had better give orders to have supper served?"

"It mightn't be a bad idea. Let me go with you, Del."

"Such a queer thing has happened to-day, Lynn," whispered Mrs. Hadwell, confidentially, as they went out together. "You remember my speaking to you of my prize housekeeper? the one beside whose frigid nature my own showed in the light of a volcano? Well, she has actually shown signs of being human for once. To-day she approached me with a request for an extra night out: at least she didn't call it that, but it was practically what she wanted. Under the circumstances—the twins arriving and the bridge people coming here, to-night—I demurred a little and asked if to-morrow wouldn't do. She then told me—with an air of wishing she didn't have to—that General Shaftan—*the* General Shaftan—had been an old friend of hers in childhood days; and that she had just received an urgent message, asking that she go without fail to his house to-night. He must be better; it is queer, for I understood that he had been quite given up: he has two nurses and is never left for a moment, day or night. Imagine! Of course I told her to go—but what in the world do you suppose it means? You know the story about the General and the bewitching Langham-Greene, of course? They were

engaged to be married some twenty years ago when Langham-Greene—who was plain Bill Greene, then—hove upon the scene with his half a million: and 'the scene was changed.' My lady dropped Shaftan like a hot potato and transformed Bill into a Benedict and a Langham-Greene. Then she drove him to drink: at least they say so! I don't believe, myself, that he took much driving. At all events he was thoughtful enough to drink himself to death: and thoughtless enough to speculate and leave her very poorly off—comparatively speaking, of course! Shaftan, in the meantime, had left the city and gone to India: and just about the time that Bill Greene drank his last glass, he blossomed out as a General and dear knows what all. Wasn't it rich? Poor Julia thought she had only to hold out a welcoming hand, when he returned; but to every one's surprise, he had neither forgotten nor forgiven. If he had even refused to meet her it would have been some solace to her vanity, but he was quite ready to go so far and was extremely polite when he did: only he would never talk to her if he could help it. She gave him up at last as a bad job. Now, when the papers can talk of nothing else but the career of the famous General Shaftan and his approaching death he sends for my housekeeper—and by the way, Mrs. Waite knew the Langham-Greene well when she was a girl, for the latter told me so, adding in her pleasant way that the poor thing had never had but the one offer which she accepted."

"I wish she had said that to me."

"She knows your tongue too well, my dear. And you make a great mistake in not conciliating the creature. Never make an enemy of a cad, male or female; for 'it' can use weapons which you would disdain to touch, and those weapons are frequently poisoned. If you must make enemies, make them of honourable people, who will simply let you alone, and not be trying to injure you; and be careful to see that every obnoxious kind of human reptile loves you. But what's the use of talking? one can't teach you common sense."

When the business of ascertaining the highest scores had been attended to Miss Erma Reed was found to be the winner of the lady's prize. Mrs. Hadwell was much amused by the warmth of Mr. Bert Hadwell's congratulations. Such plaudits as he bestowed upon her are rarely called forth by the most amazing skill: and his aunt by marriage laughed and pinched Miss Thayer's arm as she listened to them.

"When one considers Erma's height and proportions and the almost unnatural whiteness of her skin, one sees that it is merely to be expected that such a slender and brown individual as Bert should be impressed by her cleverness at bridge.... Here is your prize, dear! I am so glad you won it and I think it will go nicely with your pretty dress."

"It" was a pearl pendant which Erma received with something as nearly approaching animation as that stately and somewhat shy damsel ever showed. She

was, beyond all doubt, one of the most beautiful girls in Montreal; her absolutely flawless skin and generous though graceful proportions instinctively recalling the masterpieces of Grecian sculpture. Yet it was a cold beauty, unlit by intellectual or mirthful fires: and some of the unthinking who merely assimilate the general effect without noticing details had been heard to say openly that they preferred Mrs. Hadwell's vivacious prettiness to the younger woman's more stately charms. No one had laughed more freely at this than Mrs. Hadwell, herself. She was well aware that, devoid of artificial advantages, she would be a most insignificant little nonentity, but that fact gave her no uneasiness and diminished nothing of her graciousness toward the younger and prettier girls who thronged her entertainments and sang her praises without stint. Yet she could not bear "green girls."

"Lynn," she would say to her friend, "you have no idea what a comfort it is to feel that I can get away from them sometimes and take a rest with you. After these giggling, insipid debutantes you are like a—a cocktail! Yet it is the thing for nice women to be adored by young girls and so I must be adored, worse luck!"

CHAPTER XV

"BE PITIFUL, O GOD!"

"O God! to clasp those fingers close and yet to feel so lonely,
To see a light within those eyes that is the daylight only—
Be pitiful, O God!"
—*E. Barrett Browning.*

Amy Waite walked swiftly down the path which led from Hadwell Heights to Pine Avenue. The night was a cold one; the moon hung bright and glittering in the starlit heavens and the white, still earth seemed to her as cruel as Life, as inexorable as Time. She shivered as she walked and drew her shabby fur more closely around her throat. When would this cruel walk end? When would this crueler interview be over?

She reached her destination at length and rang the bell. General Shaftan had no relatives in Montreal, but his fame and character had won him many friends. Yet he lay dying alone in his handsome house; alone, save for the min-

istrations of a hired nurse. Mrs. Waite's thin lips curved in a smile more tragic than most tears are as she stood on the doorstep of the silent house while the keen winds blew dismally about her. Alone! What freak had made him send for her at such a time?

A silent man-servant admitted and conducted her upstairs. Amy paused long enough to remove her wraps and, while she waited, the nurse came out from the sickroom and spoke, softly.

"The General is failing fast," she whispered. "He was determined to see you this evening and so I sent you that urgent message. This afternoon he saw his lawyer on business connected with his will and I wanted him to wait till to-morrow for this, but he would not. He seemed to fear that he might not live to see another day." Her voice trembled; she was a kind-hearted soul and the General had a way of endearing himself to all with whom he came in contact. Mrs. Waite, however, stood erect and tearless, and the nurse, after a half-wondering, half-resentful glance, directed her to enter.

"He wants to see you, alone," she said, reluctantly. "But, if any change should take place in him, be sure to let me know at once."

Mrs. Waite gave the required promise and left her. The General lay, half-propped up with pillows; his bronzed face was pale with the pallor of approaching dissolution, but his eyes were the eyes of twenty. Amy's dead youth sprang to sudden life beneath them and something akin to the hopeless, useless rapture of thirty years ago awoke and cried in her heart. Her face was set and pallid, and the hands which clasped the dying soldier's were cold as his own. They looked at one another in silence which the woman could not break. The man spoke at last, a little disappointed at her lack of feeling.

"Well, Amy?" he whispered, half-quizzically.

"You—wanted to see me, Arnold?"

"I did—very much. I'm dying—I suppose you know that, eh?"

"I had heard so. I didn't know"——

"Oh, it's true enough. Don't I show in my looks that I am?"

Amy did not answer immediately nor did her face betray any especial interest in the statement. The General, after scrutinizing her closely, almost anxiously for a moment, relinquished her hand and laughed, half in amusement, half in disappointment.

"You're a cold-blooded little creature, Amy," he cried. "You always were. But you're a faithful little soul—I'd trust you through thick and thin—and I want to do something for you before I go. Also I want you to help me to pay off old scores and spite my lady Julia—you won't mind lending a hand in that, I'll wager." His still brilliant grey eyes twinkled significantly.

Amy watched him passively and smiled a little, wondering why an ugly,

faded woman of forty-eight with a sordid past should feel as keenly and cruelly as an untrained girl of eighteen. No answer suggested itself and she sat in silence, watching the dying man and wishing that she, herself, had died long ago.

The General laughed feebly as he looked at her. She was, as he had told her, such a cold-blooded little thing—rather unpleasantly like a fish—but, after all, poor little soul! she had had a beastly hard time of it; why, she looked like an old woman at fifty. He could do one good turn to a friend before he died, at all events.

"Amy," he said at last, "give me your hand, little woman! I want to know if you will marry me. Don't look surprised: this is no freak. You see if we are married I can leave you all my money—I am not poor, though I am not rich—and it's only right that you should have some comfort before you die. Then, too, I want to prevent Mrs. Julia from saying what she will say as soon as I am dead—that I always wanted her and died of grief as well as of my wound, because of her refusal. She shan't say that, by—— She spoilt my life and I'll not die till I've paid her back a little. It seems queer," he went on, with the radiant, mischievous smile that had made his listener's heart ache in the old days, "it seems queer to die a married man, Amy, after living a single one all my life. But it's never too late to mend. How thin your hand is, you poor little thing! You've had hard luck, haven't you?" He relapsed into silence, staring steadily at the wall at the foot of his bed. His eyes grew glazed and feverish.

"Don't leave me," he muttered. "Julia! Julia!"

Amy started and winced.

"You're a beastly little flirt," he went on, angrily, gripping her hand till she with difficulty refrained from crying out with pain, "a heartless, despicable little flirt and I despise you from the bottom of my soul—but, O God! I can't help loving you. No other woman has ever been to me what you were—and you—threw—me—over," he went on, slowly, with a hard, cruel expression, "for Greene. Greene! the miserable, worthless sot! Well, you made one mistake, my lady, didn't you? ... But don't turn away, Julia!" he went on, imploringly, "don't turn away from me! I can't stand it.... Your hand is cold—you don't care—O my God! you don't care!" His voice rose almost to a wail. "Julia!" he cried. "Julia! my darling, my darling!—say it's a mistake! You're not what you pretend to be—you can't be!—Julia!"

He sank back exhausted and his face relaxed. A look of intense relief overspread his features and his lips formed a smile of great beauty and tenderness.

"*Julia!*" he murmured softly. Then he died.

Amy sat quite unmoved and looked at the rigid figure. She showed no particular emotion; yet the peace which made the dead face so beautiful was lacking in the living. Some minutes elapsed. She rose at last and stood for a

moment, looking down. About that lifeless thing on the bed had clustered all her poor, starved life had held of love and romance. She bent slowly toward it; then straightened, a faint red colour in her sallow cheek.

"No!" she said, almost proudly.

She rang the bell.

"The General has just died," she said in level, unemotional accents. "It was very sudden. It was impossible to call you. I am sorry."

The big-hearted nurse looked at her with hearty repulsion and dislike and burst into a flood of tears. There seemed no particular reason for waiting further; Amy moved mechanically to the door and down the steps; and so passed quietly into the bitter night.

CHAPTER XVI
THE HOCKEY MATCH

"The day is short, the evening cometh fast;
The time of choosing, Love, will soon be past;
The outer darkness falleth, Love, at last.
Love, let us love ere it be late—too late!
* * * * *
Once, only, Love, may love's sweet song be sung,
But once, Love, at our feet life's flower is flung;
Once, Love, once only, Love, can we be young."
—Anon.

The Montreal Arena is a building of considerable size, capable of accommodating many thousands. It has been the scene of many a revel; horses, prima donnas, vegetables, all have exhibited here at one time or another; from Calvé, who raved with indignation at the idea of singing in such a place, to Emperor, the finest horse in Canada, who made no objection, whatever. Only a hockey match, however, can count positively on filling it from wall to wall.

To-night was the Wales-Conquerors match: and many a business man of mature years had sent his office boy days before to "stand in line" from nine to eleven on a bitter winter morning in order to procure tickets. Mrs. Hadwell

had secured six seats and had organized a party to escort her American guests thither. She, however, had not accompanied them, frankly acknowledging the obvious fact that she was "no sport."

"I do love to be fin-de-siecle," she had said. "But, when it comes to hockey or pug dogs—well, I simply can't, that's all." Then she had told a plaintive tale of how, when a girl, she had been taken to a hockey match. Her escort had been an enthusiast of the most virulent type; and she had been obliged to feign a joy which she by no means felt.

"It was ghastly," she observed, "ghastly. There I sat, huddled in grandmother's sealskin which wasn't a bit becoming, and watched a lot of weird things dressed like circus clowns knocking a bit of rubber round a slippery rink. And all those poor misguided beings who had paid two, three and five dollars to see them do it yelled like mad whenever the rubber got taken down a little faster than usual—oh, you may laugh! but I can tell you that when one of those silly men whacked another silly man over the head when the umpire wasn't looking because the second ass had hit that absurd bit of rubber oftener than he, the first ass, had—why, I felt sorry to think that the human species to which I belonged was so devoid of sense. And that great goat who stood at one end and tried to stop the thing from getting between two sticks! why did everyone think he was a hero when he managed to get his two big feet together in time to stop the rubber from getting through? I don't see anything very clever in putting your feet together and letting a rubber thing come bang against your toes, do you?

"But what's the use of talking! You must think it clever. You must! or why should you go? Where is the attraction? Do you *like* hearing those wild-looking men shouting insults at the men who don't play on their team? Does it amuse you to hear them snarling, 'Dirty Smith! Putimoff!' 'Butcher Brown! Knockiseadoff, Robinson!' It is incomprehensible to me. I shall always remember Alice Mann's proud face as she watched her brother chasing round while the crowd hailed him by the dignified and endearing title of 'Dirty Mann.' I think that, if I had a brother and heard him called 'Dirty Mann' in public, I should want to leave the city."

Accordingly Mrs. Hadwell had stayed at home; but a merry and expectant party had met at Hadwell Heights and had driven to the Arena, where they sat now, awaiting the fray. It would be some time before this began, so the young strangers had time to look about them and comment on the various spectators. Ladies wrapped in costly furs sat side by side with shabbily dressed men, who, in spite of the printed reminder that smoke was forbidden, ejected a constant stream in the air, the while they hoarsely sang the merits of their favourite team and the demerits of the opposing one. Small boys perched on the rafters, looking as though a finger touch would hurl them to instant destruction.

"If one of them did fall," inquired Bertie, with a shudder, "wouldn't he be

instantly killed?"

"If he were lucky," returned her companion, a young McGill professor named Donovan, cheerfully. "Otherwise he might only injure himself for life."

"But"——

"But you see, Miss Hadwell, none of them ever do fall. Not one boy has ever lost his hold, as far as I know. If one of them did get killed of course it would be stopped."

"But don't they get awfully excited?"

"Excited! They go mad. But they don't fall."

"You see," interposed Gerald Amherst, "they never think about it. If one of them stopped clapping and wriggling and began to measure the space from his airy perch to the ice, below; and furthermore meditate on the consistency and solidity of the aforesaid ice and the probable fate of anyone whose head came in contact with it after a fall of seventy to a hundred feet—why, he would drop, that's all. They are occupied with more important matters, however; the merits of Smith as a goal-keeper, the demerits of Brown as a forward—they have no time to muse upon their latter end and the thin veil that lies between them and eternity."

"I'm glad they haven't; for my part I'm convinced that I shall have nightmare after seeing them. Is that your—what is the band playing for? Oh, is that the Vice-Regal party? Dear me! what is every one rising for? Must I get up, too?"

Her voice was drowned in the strains of the National Anthem which was howled enthusiastically by boxes and rafters, alike. As, "God save the King" died into silence the Governor-General bowed and took his seat; while his daughters gazed with interest about the Arena which they were visiting for the first time.

"Observe his coat," said Mr. Donovan. "Feast your American eyes on it. That coat was bought by Lord Dufferin, and left by him to be worn by his successors. The sleeves are quite out of style by this time; but you see 'This is a man!' What's your opinion of him, on the whole?"

"Why, I think—good gracious, what's that!"

A roar that shook the roof arose as the opposing teams emerged from the waiting room and skated upon the ice. The scarlet sweaters and caps of the Conquerors stained the crystal ice with daubs of blood: and the more sombre hues of the Wales showed with almost equal effect.

"Oh, are they beginning?" cried Bertie in ecstasy.

They were. The whistle blew and both sides skated to the centre to receive the customary warning.

"They both seem pretty cool," remarked Mr. Amherst. "No signs of nervousness that I can see."

"Not a particle. Look! who has won the toss? The Conquerors? Hurrah!

You must say 'Hurrah!' too, Mr. Hadwell, whenever anything nice happens to the Conquerors. It's no fun unless you choose a team."

"Why is the Conquerors your team?"

"Because—oh, because the captain's father was baptized by my grandfather, I believe. There is some such reason, but, for the moment, I forget just what it is. Any reason will do, you know; the point is that you must have a favourite team and shout whenever it scores and groan with indignation whenever the other team does. Do you see?"

"I see. When am I to begin? and how am I to let the public know what I am groaning about?"

"Oh, the public will know if you groan in the right place—that is, when the other team does well. Oh, look! there goes the puck!"

It dashed across the ice, followed by a mass of skimming, pursuing forms; and, for the next few moments, silence reigned. Then a shout arose, "Off-side!"

"Off-side" it was; and the indignant audience hurled insults impartially at both teams; no one seeming very sure as to which was "off-side," but each assuming that it could not be a member of his favourite team. The Conquerors lost to the Wales this time and the latter passed to one of his team who succeeded in sending the puck flying toward the goal. Intense excitement reigned: would he succeed in getting the puck past the goal-keeper? No: the latter deftly turned it aside; and a roar of mingled delight and disappointment arose which made the American girl start and put her hands to her ears.

"Do they often make such a noise?" she asked, involuntarily.

"I should think so," answered Donovan, staring. "You don't mind it, do you? Oh, shame on you, Parton! what are you thinking about, Umpire?—don't mind me, Miss Hadwell, I'm just—Hurray! Bully for you, Marsh! oh, good work, old boy. You're the stuff! Push it along—*Hurray!*"

The puck had passed and the Conquerors had drawn first blood. In the first wild shriek that rose Bertie was conscious chiefly of one thing—everybody's mouth was wide open. No individual shriek could be distinguished, yet, judging from appearances, every one, from the Governor-General in his box to the smallest imp on the highest rafter, was shouting himself hoarse. Slowly the excitement subsided; slowly the spectators sank back into the seats which they had vacated; and, after a minute or two of preparation, the game recommenced.

"Never tell me again that the English are a cold race," Bertie remarked solemnly as the party took their seats in Mrs. Hadwell's carriage at the close of the evening. "I have read of such things, but I never expected to see them in Canada. I could go to a hockey match every night in the week. It's grand! And, Mr. Donovan, if the Wales had won—as I thought at one time they would—I believe I should have cried myself to sleep. Oh, you needn't laugh! I mean it."

An hour or so later, after the assembled guests had partaken of a supper at Hadwell Heights, Lynn and Gerald Amherst left together and walked slowly in the direction of the city. It was midnight and the streets were practically deserted. For a short time they walked on in silence, neither caring to speak of anything except the subject which was uppermost in the minds of both. Finally, however, Gerald broke the silence.

"Lynn," he said, very quietly, "I have tried to tell you something several times. You have always turned the subject in one way or another. This has been going on now for a long time, for a very long time. I can't have it. I must know to-night, what it is to be. You don't understand, I think, how hard this is on me; if you did, you wouldn't be vexed with me for speaking so plainly." He paused.

"I—am not vexed with you. I had rather you spoke, plainly—but"—

"But—there it is, again. You seem uneasy, almost unhappy about the matter. Yet I don't think you altogether dislike me; in fact—in fact there have been times when I was sure you cared—then when I saw you next, you were quite different, altogether different. You seemed to avoid me. I know it is quite impossible to understand a woman, but, some way, I can't help hoping. You are so sincere in other ways that I think you would be sincere even about a thing like this. Now tell me! There is some trouble, some difficulty, I know. Won't you tell me what it is?"

"Oh, no—I can't."

"Why not? Is it that you are thinking of some one else—of Harold Lighton, for instance—and that you can't be sure as to which you prefer"—

"No, that is not it. You have been frank; and I will be frank in return. I prefer you to any other man that I have ever known."

"Then"—

"No, stop! You don't understand me. I did not say that I wanted to marry you and"—

"You mean that you—don't care enough, is that it?"

"N-no. I can't say that, exactly."

"What then?" he asked, eagerly; but Lynn was silent, staring at the lights of the distant city.

"Lynn!—what in God's name do you mean? Think! Think of what you have said. In one breath you almost allow that you care for me; and, in the next, you say, practically, that you can't marry me. What does it all mean?"

"I can't tell you."

"You must. Try."

"I know that I must sound ridiculous and unreasonable to you, but the fact remains. I do love you; I can't bear to let you go away without telling you so. But for reasons which—which I can't explain—I don't think that I can marry you."

”But, Lynn, what in the world can you mean? You have no ties! nothing that can bind you down or prevent you from doing as you please. What do you mean?”

Lynn walked on in silence for a little while, then turned. Her face was white.

”I can’t marry you, Gerald,” she said, distinctly.

”Why not? There’s some one else?”

”No—not in the way you mean.”

”Then it’s just that you don’t care enough. It must be.”

She said nothing, but bit her lips and quivered.

”You do care,” he burst forth, suddenly. ”Lynn, you do care. I know it. I feel it. You have taken some crazy notion in your head, some fanatical idea or other. Tell me! I insist on knowing what it is. If you care for me you will confide in me about this. You must see how cruelly unfair it is to tell me that you can’t marry me and to refuse to even let me know the reason. Tell me! Even if it is something which prevents our marrying now, the difficulty may be surmounted in a few years’ time. Tell me.”

Lynn started and turned toward firm, her face suddenly illuminated.

”Do you?” she cried, breathlessly, ”do you—oh, it isn’t right, I oughtn’t to ask it—but do you care enough to wait—to wait—perhaps, for a year, or even two years and keep our—the engagement secret?”

”Why, of course I do. What’s two years against a life-time? But, Lynn, I don’t like secrecy. Can’t you tell me what all this means?”

She paused, then spoke, weighing each word, carefully.

”I have a trouble, a care; something which prevents me from even thinking of marriage. It concerns other people and I can tell you nothing about it. But, at any time, I—may be released from it. Perhaps in a week—perhaps not for years—but eventually—I shall be free—broken-hearted and old with grief—but free. Till then. And even then, understand clearly, Gerald, I can explain, nothing—nothing. Now I have told you the truth so far as I am able; and you see for yourself how hopeless it is. Leave me. I am plain and sad and old. Marry some one else, Gerald, and forget me.”

”Some one else! Lynn, my dear, dear girl, you don’t know what nonsense you’re talking. Only say that you’ll marry me—promise me that—and everything else may slide. To-morrow—a year—three years—what does it matter, as long as you come to me in the end?”

”But—no one must know—oh, Gerald, it can’t be right to hold you. I shouldn’t.”

”Perfectly right and perfectly wise; if, for any reason, you are obliged to keep it secret. Only, Lynn, you must promise me one thing. The moment that

you are released from your obligation, whatever it may be, you must tell me. Promise me that you will let no false motives of delicacy stand in your way, but will come and tell me that you are ready to marry me, the instant that the obstacle is removed. I won't even ask what it is; I shall only ask that you promise me this."

And Lynn promised.

CHAPTER XVII
A SCANDAL VERIFIED

"I'm not denying that women are foolish: God Almighty made 'em to match the men."—*George Eliot.*

"Gracious, man! do give those unfortunate eyes of yours a rest. I should think they would ache, the way you roll them. Besides, it's such a waste of time to make eyes at me."

"I don't think so."

"I suppose it keeps you in practice," Miss Bent remarked, sardonically.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said," repeated Miss Bent, slowly and deliberately, "that I supposed that—it—kept—you—in practice—to—make—eyes—at—me!"

"It does. But that's not the only reason I do it."

Miss Bent eyed him with extreme disfavour.

"How silly you are," she said, snubbingly.

"Now that's unworthy of you," her companion returned. "Its rudeness is worthy of you, but not its stupidity. Ordinarily your remarks are witty, even when they are rude, but this"—

"Has only truth to recommend it."

"I don't care for verbal gymnastics."

"Your likes and dislikes are not"—

"A matter of interest to you? no, I suppose not. And you see that relieves me from considering yours. Take the present case, for instance. I feel like making eyes, as you rudely call it, at you: therefore I make them"—

"And make them very badly!" interpolated the well-bred Miss Bent.

"You are no judge, being by nature incapable of doing anything in the eye-

making way at all."

"Ah!" said Miss Bent, reflectively, "there is no saying how well I might make eyes if I saw anything worth making eyes at. But, I say, don't be cross."

"I'm not!"

"No, of course not: but don't, anyway, for I want to tell you something and some way I can't talk to cross people"—

"But I tell you I'm not"—

"Dear, dear! there you are again with a face flaming with rage, interrupting me and contradicting me."

Mr. Ogden opened his mouth; then shut it with an air of determination, as though he really might have replied, had he chosen.

"And now you're glaring at me as if you were beside yourself with rage. Why don't you try to be reasonable?"

The unhappy Mr. Ogden stared wildly but ventured no remark.

"I suppose I may go on now," Miss Bent said in a rather pointed manner when a moment of silence had elapsed. "What I began to tell you half an hour ago—only you would keep interrupting me—was that Mrs. Hadwell is giving all sorts of things for those cousins, or whatever they are, of hers from the States. And she has asked me to a theatre party and a tobogganing party, so I think I ought to give something for them. What would you suggest?"

Mr. Ogden looked perplexed.

"Surely you're not sulking all this time!" said Miss Bent, rather sadly.

"I don't know what you mean. I never sulk."

"Then, perhaps, instead of sulking, you will answer my question," said Miss Bent with asperity.

Mr. Ogden laughed.

"I should suggest a drive," he hazarded. "A drive by moonlight and a supper afterwards."

"Perhaps that would be the best plan," said Miss Bent, thoughtfully. "Who would you ask?"

"Me, for one."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so, but—O dear! has my snowshoe come off, again?"

"Let me fix it."

"What do you suppose is the reason?"

"The reason? You didn't let me do it at the start."

"I suppose you think you can attend to my snowshoes better than I can myself."

"I do, indeed."

"Well, don't start to argue about that, please don't. I haven't seen you for such a long time and there are such a lot of things that I want to say, but some

way, whenever I am going to start, something happens to prevent me."

"Your snowshoe, for instance?"

"Yes, or you. You begin to argue about something. Now don't be cross! I suppose I really shouldn't have said that, but"—

"Oh, it's quite true that I occasionally make a remark."

"Occasionally!"

"Very occasionally, yes. When people are with you they don't talk much as a rule. Queer, isn't it?"

"I suppose," said his companion after thinking deeply for a moment, "that what you mean is that they don't get much chance."

"That was my meaning, exactly."

"I can't help talking a little sometimes, you know," said Miss Bent, icily——

"You can't, indeed!"

"No. I come by it honestly. *My own father was a man!*"

Silence reigned, unbroken and long. The snowshoers trudged on in silence, the lady chuckling delightedly to herself.

"I had two things to tell you," she remarked, presently, perceiving that her companion was unmoved by her silence and getting very tired of preserving it.

"Yes?"

"Yes. The second one is gossip, so I suppose I shouldn't"—

"Oh, but you will."

"Not," said Miss Bent, impressively, "not unless you promise solemnly never to tell a living soul about it—especially not Agatha!"

"Why is Agatha to be debarred from hearing what no living soul may know?"

"Because," said his companion, seriously, "Agatha is not to be trusted. She can't keep a secret. Oh, you needn't laugh. The person who told me this said the same thing to me. 'Don't tell anyone about this,' she said, most earnestly, 'and whoever you tell, don't tell Agatha.'"

"What lack of confidence you two secretive people do show in Agatha. Why is it?"

"In the first place because she's a cat."

"Doesn't seem conclusive. I've known cats who talked less than some ladies."

"—And in the second because she's her cousin."

"Whose? The cat's?"

"No. Lynn Thayer's."

"My golf-balls! Where are we at?"

"Why, I'm sure I've made myself plain enough," said Miss Bent, looking surprised.

"On the contrary you've made yourself awfully pretty in your sporting togs but you have *not* made yourself explicit."

"You silly thing! Don't you see what I mean? It's Lynn Thayer that the gossip's about."

"Oh, Miss Thayer," said Ogden. "Then I hardly think it's true."

"Oh, it must be. This person saw her. It seemed so queer she could hardly believe her eyes."

"What did?"

"Why, Lynn's being there alone at that time of night. Not that it was a proper place for a lady at any time"——

"What place wasn't?"

"Dear me, Neil, you are stupid, sometimes. Why, St. Eustache St."——

"Whew! St. Eustache St.!"

"Yes, and at eleven o'clock at night."

"Nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense. Mabel saw her—there! I let out the name, but you won't tell anyone, will you?—at all events you won't mention that it was Mabel"——

"Mabel be—wait a moment. Your friend saw Miss Thayer—at eleven o'clock at night on St. Eustache St."—

"Yes. Coming out of that rackety studio building on the south side, where unspeakable beings congregate."

"What? Oh, look here, Kitty, you mustn't say that. You don't know what you're saying. Your friend, whoever she is, made a mistake—a big mistake. It was not Lynn Thayer she saw at all—it could not possibly have been—and she does a very wrong and wicked thing in spreading such stories. Now what I want you to do is"——

"Neil, one would think I was fifteen. Do you suppose Mabel would say such a thing if it wasn't true? She didn't think at first that it could be Lynn, though she saw her distinctly; and so she followed her."

"Oh! Well, Kitty, all I can say is that if your friend's a woman, I'm glad I'm a man. By the way, was this paragon alone?"

"Certainly not. She and her husband had been to the French theatre: and, as it was a fine night they decided to walk home. Then they began talking about how these awful old streets used to be fashionable, and he said that he would show her an interesting old house in St. Eustache St. So they went there and he pointed it out to her and told her how it used to belong to the Duke of —— and how now it had degenerated into the haunt of all sorts of people. Just as he was saying that only confirmed drunkards and opium eaters and things ever went there the door opened—and, to their infinite astonishment, Lynn Thayer came out."

"Your friend's a"——

"She isn't. She's a nice woman and so is her husband—at least I mean he's—well, anyway, they followed her for a block or two and she called a closed sleigh and, just for fun, they got into another and drove behind her. She went up to Pine Avenue and so they began to think that they must be mistaken when—what do you think?—she got out, paid the cabman and walked back to her aunt's house! There was no possible mistake about it."

Neil trudged along in silence for a few moments.

"Kitty," he said at last, "there seem to be only two interpretations that can be put on that story. The first is that Lynn Thayer, a girl who has always been considered one of the nicest in Montreal, has done an unpardonable thing; the second, that your friends are liars. I prefer to think the latter—hello! do you want to run over us? Where's your light?"

"Beg pardon, sir. I've just been driving a lady who asked me to put it out while I was up here. I'll light it right away."

"It's not right, a sleigh going at that rate without light: what on earth could the woman have meant by telling him to put it out. She must be—well, Kitty, what on earth is it?"

"Hush! Look!"

He looked. A woman clad in a long dark cloak and wearing a heavy veil passed them with averted head and hasty steps. Her walk and figure were unmistakable. She shrank into the shadow of the leafless maples and descended rapidly citywards.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. HADWELL'S FANCY DRESS BALL

"When Youth and Pleasure meet
To chase the glowing hours with flying feet."
—*Byron.*

There is a fascination about a fancy dress ball which appertains to no other form of entertainment. The excitement of seeing one's common-place acquaintances blossoming out, under the magic influence of costume, into fairies, kings and

cavaliers is one which never palls.

Interesting it is, too, to observe the characters impersonated and to note how clearly the character of the impersonator is expressed in his choice. Thus Mrs. Hadwell, on the evening of her famous ball, appeared as Titania, clad in a fluffy, shimmering robe of mousseline, which was further embellished and beautified by various shining ornaments and clusters of hothouse blooms. A sparkling diadem crowned her rich auburn tresses and a necklace of some value glittered on her neck. Her pretty arms were covered with bracelets and her prettier feet were adorned by diamond-studded sandals. She moved among her guests a shining, odorous, "form of faery," followed by ejaculations of admiration and murmurs of delight.

Erma Reed, on the other hand, had wisely chosen the dress of ancient Greece: and her chiselled features showed clearly cut and noble beneath the chaplet of green leaves which lay lightly on her smooth, dark locks; while her flowing robe added distinction and grace to her splendid form, beside which the puny, slender figures of more modern beauties seemed mean and artificial.

Lynn Thayer came, dressed as a Red Cross nurse. "Nothing about me suggests the heroine of history or romance," she said, "and I should make myself ridiculous by attempting to personate anything but an ordinary, everyday woman." She made a noble-looking nurse, however, and many turned from the more fancifully attired dames to watch her sympathetic countenance: some thinking, as they did so, that hers was a face that they would like to see in moments of illness or depression. Others there were, though, who watched her covertly and whispered stealthily to one another as she passed: and Lynn noted with surprise that Neil Ogden, who was standing by Kitty Bent, looked down hastily as he saw her approaching and made no sign of recognition. Nor did Kitty seem anxious to return her bow.

The twins in whose honour the affair had been contrived attracted more attention than all the other guests put together. They were in mad spirits and seemed unable to keep apart, hurrying to one another's side as soon as each dance was finished and whispering and laughing together in unrestrained fashion. Bert was attired as Mark Antony in flowing Egyptian robes, donned, as he explained, after he had made the acquaintance of the Serpent of the Nile: and he handled the crimson, voluminous garments with a grace which called forth more than one admiring comment from his partners. Their compliments were invariably received with a stifled giggle: in fact Bert's manners, as a whole, did not show their usual reserve and good breeding. Still the handsome, boyish face above the crimson draperies was so alight with good humour; the black eyes were so unaccountably mischievous and the olive cheeks so becomingly flushed that the most exigeant of his uncle's guests could not find it in her heart to be really severe

until—but that, as Mr. Kipling says, is another story.

As for his sister, it is safe to say that no other girl created such a sensation. It was not only her appearance, though that was sufficiently striking, but the wild gayety and vivacity of her demeanour that made her the cynosure of every eye. She was dressed as a lady of the French court in a tightly fitting gown of French brocade with trailing draperies: and her eyes looked even darker and brighter than their wont beneath the high structure of powdered hair which the dress demanded. The pink and white brocade and the crimson robe of Egypt were so frequently seen in absorbed conversation that the twinly devotion of Mrs. Hadwell's connections was a favourite topic of conversation at the beginning of the evening. Later on, I regret to say—but here again I anticipate.

Agatha Ladilaw, dressed as the Queen of the Roses, received her usual meed of praise and attention. Her three lovers followed her around with dog-like devotion; and many others, seeing what a magnet she was for three of the conflicting sex, hastened to make her acquaintance in order to discover for themselves what the attraction was. Agatha, in consequence, became more than ever convinced that she was bound to make the best match of any girl who had come out that year; and considered more seriously than before the advisability of adding a still more eligible fourth to her list of fiances. Among the many who sunned themselves in her smiles was Harold Lighton, who found her gaze of respectful attention and her eager and smiling responses so soothing after his late reverses that he insisted on sitting out several dances with her in order that he might give her further particulars of her cousin's cruelty; which cruelty she almost wept over.

"She's such a queer girl, Mr. Lighton," she said, shyly yet impulsively, "oh, I know she's my own cousin and perhaps I oughtn't to say so but"—

"Isn't she?" inquired the disconsolate lover, eagerly. "As you're her cousin, I suppose I can say so"—

"Anything you say," said Agatha, dimpling seraphically, "is quite safe with me, Mr. Lighton—anything!" She raised her deep, soulful eyes to him with an air of rapt attention and Mr. Lighton found himself murmuring involuntarily, "What a charming girl!"

"All I was going to say was," he continued, returning to the attack, but half forgetting his griefs in the joy of finding such an intelligent listener, "that your cousin really doesn't treat a fellow fairly. Now she won't listen to anything a fellow tries to tell her. All she will say is, 'Surely we have discussed this often enough, Mr. Lighton; do talk of something else!' Now, hang it all, Miss Ladilaw, that's rude!"

"I should think it was," exclaimed Agatha, looking appropriately shocked and grieved and inwardly wondering whether any man *could* spend an hour in her society and bestow a thought afterwards on a plain girl like Lynn.

"And then, when I tell her she is rude, all she will say is, 'I wonder you come to see me so often when I am so unpleasant and there are so many nice girls in the world.'" He paused.

"Ah!" said Agatha, softly, wondering inwardly why he did; and wondering, moreover, whether it was too soon to ask him to drop in some quiet evening when she was quite sure of having no other callers, in order that they might the more fully discuss her cousin's iniquities.

"And then to have her add the finishing touch by refusing me outright after all the time I've spent on"——

"What?" said Agatha, startled, for once, out of all semblance of good manners. Was the man in earnest? Had he actually proposed? and had the fool—for no other word seemed appropriately to describe her cousin—had the fool refused him? Agatha gasped and caught her breath. Refused him! refused a horse and carriage and a nice house and a trip to Europe if she wanted it? Agatha could scarcely regain her composure.

"Yes, indeed, she refused me," reiterated the Rejected One, indignantly. "And she not only refused me but she told me that I would thank her for her refusal ten years hence."

"Mr. Lighton," Agatha's voice was solemn—"Do you—I don't suppose you do, but—excuse my asking—*do* you still want to marry her?"

"I should rather think I did," rejoined Mr. Lighton, staring. "Never was so dead gone on any girl in my life. But it's no use; I may as well make up my mind to"——

"Mr. Lighton, if it is any satisfaction to you, I shall speak to my cousin. I cannot feel," Agatha continued, raising her big eyes almost tearfully to her companion's face, "I cannot feel that it is right to let my cousin refuse such an offer—I mean, such an honest and manly love as yours—without, at any rate, trying to show her how—how *wicked* it is. For," said Agatha with righteous indignation, "for what is Lynn, anyway? A public school teacher! And whom else is she going to get if she refuses you? Nobody! And I don't care whether she likes it or not I'm going to put her conduct before her in the right light."

"That's the stuff," said Mr. Lighton, delightedly. "You're a fine little girl, that's what: and I tell you what it is, if you do make any impression on her—which," said Mr. Lighton, relapsing into despondency, "which you won't, for she's as stubborn as a—but, if you should—why, all I can say is, I'll never forget it."

Agatha had, as all ladies who follow the time-honoured sport of man-hunting must have, an eye to all contingencies. She impulsively clasped her companion's big hand in her two small ones now as she murmured, feelingly:

"Don't think that I am intruding, Mr. Lighton, but, if this *should* be a

failure—and no one can tell anything where Lynn is concerned—always remember that you have one friend, anyway."

"I won't forget it," responded Mr. Lighton with alacrity. Nice little thing! Pity her cousin wasn't more like her, that was all he could say. And yet, confound it all! there was something about the other—he couldn't help liking her in spite of everything—but, whatever happened, this little thing was worth cultivating. He wondered, as Agatha with a sympathetic smile and an air of stern resolve gathered up her pink draperies and departed in search of her cousin what the outcome of it would be. Well! he would soon know, at all events.

CHAPTER XIX

AGATHA "DOES HER DUTY" AND IS REWARDED

"Shall a woman's virtues move
Me to perish for her love?
Or her well-deservings known
Make me quite forget my own?
If she slight me when I woo
I can scorn and let her go."
—*G. Wither.*

Past Boadicea, reclining against a marble heater and conversing with Mephistopheles; past Joan of Arc, flirting vigorously with Torquemeda; past the Queen of the Fairies, chatting to a miscellaneous group of knights and demons; past every variety of hero and lady fair went the self-sacrificing Agatha, intent on her altruistic aim. "For," as she muttered to herself, "if he has proposed to her, already, it isn't very likely that he will change for a little while, anyway, and I want to be married before any of the other girls. Besides it wouldn't be half so nice to marry a man who had been refused by your own cousin; though every one would think you had cut her out and Lynn is so funny that she would probably just giggle and say nothing, so it wouldn't matter much. But, as matters stand, I think it would be really wicked to let Lynn actually refuse him, particularly when I can get so many others: and, once they are married, she will be grateful to me as well as he and they will have a nice home and entertain a lot and I can

be their bridesmaid and everyone will say how much prettier I am than the bride and"—At this moment she caught sight of her quarry.

Lynn had been dancing and had just come out to the hall in search of a vacant chair or stair when she saw a vision of pink tulle gazing at her with such an unusual amount of feeling and expressiveness that, with a hasty excuse, she dropped her partner's arm and hurried to her small cousin's side.

"Agatha," she exclaimed, wonderingly. "What is it? Is anything the matter? Do you want me?"

"Indeed I do," responded Agatha, solemnly.

"Then just let me speak to Mr. Barnes a moment and explain why I am going: then we can run upstairs to Del's little sitting-room and talk quietly."

This programme was carried out; and, when they were safely ensconced behind closed doors, Lynn turned eagerly to her cousin.

"Now, Agatha!" she said.

Agatha turned and looked at her.

"Lynn," she said with portentous solemnity, "I don't know what you will think of me and I don't care. Some one has got to talk to you."

Lynn stared in amazement, wondering if her thrice-engaged cousin objected to her dancing twice with the same man: she could think of no other enormity of which she had been guilty that evening.

"I have been sitting out a couple of dances with Mr. Lighton, and he became unusually confidential," went on Agatha, turning almost pale: "and he tells me," pausing impressively, "he tells me that you—have—refused—him."

"He tells the truth," responded Lynn, looking annoyed, "and all I can say is, Agatha, that if you have torn me away from the dance"—

"Wait a moment," said Agatha, earnestly. "This is very important to me, Lynn. It isn't only that I feel sorry that you, being my cousin, should be so foolish as to refuse him, once; but what I want to know is,—did you mean it?"

"Assuredly I did," said Lynn, staring.

"You meant," said Agatha, pathetically, "you really meant, Lynn, to refuse that nice house and"—

"Yes, and that nice horse, too," exclaimed Lynn, turning red. "Upon my word this is too much! I can stand Aunt Lucy and Del, but when it comes to you, Agatha—understand once for all that I meant to refuse that nice house and that good-sized yard at the back and that commodious stable with all that it contains—not even excepting the horse which every one seemed to think that I would accept with tears of rapture, despite the fact that it was encumbered with a master whom I should have to accept, likewise, as they are inseparable."

"Oh, Lynn, dear! such a lot of long words and such a temper and all because I tried to advise you for your own good."

"Agatha, I give you fair warning that I shall gently but firmly assassinate the very next person who tries to advise me for my own good."

Agatha sat for a moment, absorbed in thought.

"Lynn," she said, presently, "does anyone know that you have refused Mr. Lighten?"

"Not unless he has chosen to tell anyone. I am not in the habit of publishing every offer I receive in the daily papers, which is one reason why some people suppose that I never get any."

"Then," said Agatha, thinking deeply, "I suppose, Lynn, you will not mind if I advise you not to—not to tell anyone? Do you remember what you said to me about those things—proposals and engagements and things, you know!—well, at the time I did say I thought it was foolish not to tell when people proposed to you because then lots of people, as you say, think you never get any—but since then I have changed my mind; I really think it is more sensible not to—particularly in your case where it would be so embarrassing for Mr. Lighton if he were attentive to some girl."

Lynn burst out laughing.

"I never in my life told on any man who was misguided enough to ask me to marry him. I have always felt that the pain of feeling that he had so lowered himself was punishment enough for any crime."

"Why, Lynn, I don't quite see what you mean," said Agatha, patient but bewildered.

"This is all I mean," said Lynn, gravely. "If you have any idea of going in for Lighton—and certainly his house is all that could be desired—why, don't feel as you walk up the aisle in veil and orange blossoms that I am whispering to my nearest acquaintance, 'I could have had that man if I had wanted him.'"

"But," said Agatha, timidly, "suppose such a thing *did* happen—it would not be very nice for you, Lynn, to think that people were saying that I had cut you out. That is the first thing that Mrs. Langham-Greene would think."

"I can think of nothing at the moment less likely to worry me than Mrs. Langham-Greene's thoughts concerning me."

"Oh, how queer you are!" said Agatha, opening her eyes widely. "Then, Lynn, if you should hear—well, anything! you won't mind. For there is still time for you to change your mind, you know; and really he's very fond of you, and his house"—

"Has only one drawback! Now don't dare to tell him I said that, Agatha, or"—

"Why, I don't know what you did say," responded Agatha, patiently. "You say such queer things, Lynn, that half the time I don't know what you're driving at. At all events, however, as I understand, you are quite determined not to accept

Mr. Lighton."

"Quite."

"Then," said Agatha, dimpling bewitchingly and adjusting her rose wreath with an air of satisfaction, "then, Lynn, I must just go and tell him so, I suppose."

She found the Rejected sitting where she had left him, and gazing disconsolately into space. He brightened a little as she sat down beside him.

"You had no luck, I suppose?" he remarked, tentatively.

"Mr. Lighton," cooed Agatha, softly, "she is not worthy of you. She is my own cousin, but I can't help saying so."

Mr. Lighton turned a rich, ripe tan colour, the nearest approach to a flush of rage that his skin was capable of attaining.

"Made fun of me, I suppose?" he queried in tones of stifled fury. "Oh, you needn't try to smooth it over, Miss Ladilaw! I know that tongue of hers too well."

"Well," said Agatha, commiseratingly, "I must say, Mr. Lighton, that she might have been nicer. It's one thing to refuse a man and another to make jokes about it. Not that she said much, you know, but there was one speech about your house having only one drawback"—

"That," exclaimed Mr. Lighton in a burst of horrible enlightenment, "was Me!"

"I am afraid so," said Agatha, softly. "But please don't tell any one I repeated it, Mr. Lighton. I really shouldn't have, you know. But I felt so disturbed and angry at the idea of any one belonging to me being so heartless"—

Six months later when Miss Agatha Ladilaw, "the prettiest debutante of the former season," made "the match of the year," Lynn felt rather hurt at the demeanour of both bride and groom toward her.

"I was disagreeable," she reflected, "but he brought it on himself and I can't understand why the mention of my name should invariably produce a chill in the Ladilaw household. Agatha, at least, has nothing to blame me for."

Agatha and Agatha's husband, however, agreed in seeing as little as possible of Agatha's cousin and in acting as coldly as was consistent with politeness whenever they did meet her. This, Society thought, was owing to the fact that poor Miss Thayer had cherished useless aspirations in the direction of the Lighton house, herself. Poor Miss Thayer!

CHAPTER XX

THE TWINS UNDER A NEW ASPECT

"Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful jollity."
—*Milton.*

The fun was at its height. The most delightful waltz of the evening had just concluded and streams of gaily dressed forms poured in the direction of the balcony. It was mid-winter and the thermometer stood at five below: yet more than one couple strolled out on the balcony and stood, contracting lung trouble and pneumonia, while they gazed enraptured at the beautiful panorama which spread beneath them. The city was a mass of glittering lights, seen through the delicate pencilled branches of bare maples and willows; and seemed to the watchers as though lying hundreds of feet below Hadwell Heights. At the foot of the high hill on which the house was built lay Pine Avenue, thronged with couples arrayed in sporting garb and bent on their way to the toboggan slide at the back of the mountain. Less often a party of snowshoers would rush past on their ungainly footgear: an object of little amusement to the Canadians but one of never-failing interest to the Americans: and, less frequently still, a couple of men on skis. The twins, who never thought of colds or of precautions against them, spent most of their time between the dances in standing in the most exposed part of the balcony and watching the passers-by until the icy winds which whirled around drove them indoors, shivering but happy.

Bertie seemed to-night as though possessed of some demon of mischief and unrest. She confessed to a rather bad cold already, but it detracted nothing from her appearance though it affected her usually sweet voice, rendering it hoarse and strained. No entreaties could keep her from the icy balcony, though, and her partners soon stopped making them and devoted themselves to carrying on the flirtations which she seemed determined to push to the utmost limit. Never had any of her Canadian admirers seen her in such a mood; her usual gay, but rather reserved manner had given place to the one commonly attributed to the American girl in foreign fiction. Her partners were at first amazed, then flattered at her open and eager anxiety for their attentions; but some, including Donovan, her companion of the hockey match, who had come to like and admire the pretty Ohio girl, were rather repelled and disgusted at the change in her. Toward the end of the evening his disgust reached a climax. An extremely shy and painfully proper youth to whom Bertie had begged him to introduce her at the beginning of the evening, had just emerged from sitting out a dance with her and had asked Donovan to have a smoke with him in Mr. Hadwell's "den," which, for this night, was given over to the needs of the dancers. On Donovan's assenting, Mr. Simcoe, the shy youth, had unfolded a tale of horror. He had come up for

his dance with Miss Hadwell when she, without a word of apology, had piloted him in the direction of the stairs, murmuring, as she did so, "We don't want to dance, do we? We can do better than that." On his expressing his willingness to do as she wished she had squeezed his arm and informed him in an ecstatic whisper that he was a duck, a perfect duck, and that she was going to show him a nice little cubby hole behind some curtains at the end of the hall which she was sure Mrs. Hadwell must have fixed expressly for them. "Of course," Mr. Simcoe had remarked, nervously, "of course I couldn't refuse to go, Donovan." Donovan, looking very grim, had agreed with him: of course he could not. So, it appeared, they had gone. Mr. Simcoe had seemed unwilling to divulge the secrets of his prison house but had gone so far as to hint that ladies who asked fellows to kiss them on so short an acquaintance were not in his line. Donovan had informed him here that gentlemen did not, as a rule, "kiss and tell": and had refused to listen further, regardless of Mr. Simcoe's anguished explanation. "But I didn't, Donovan! hang it all, it was she who insisted, you know, and she can't blame me for speaking of it." Donovan had walked off in a furious rage, awakened, not so much by Mr. Simcoe's lack of gallantry as by Miss Hadwell's lack of common sense and good breeding.

If Miss Bertie's conduct gave rise to comment, what shall be said of Mr. Bert's? It is safe to say that never before in a Montreal drawing-room had any gentleman disported himself with such amazing freedom. Before many dances had transpired ominous whispers might have been heard among the young ladies who had been honoured with his partnership; and it was a matter of common observation that, toward the end of the evening, several of his companions flatly refused to "sit out" dances which he had engaged, earlier. The most amazing snub which he received came from Miss Reed, who, on his reminding her that she had promised him the eighteenth dance, had answered in tones of ice, "So sorry, Mr. Hadwell, but I never dance—except with gentlemen!" This was merely the climax of a series of unpleasant remarks which had been showered upon him; but, coming from Miss Reed, who was known to have absorbed all his time and attention until that evening, it was expected to have had a chilling effect upon him. This, however, was far from being the case. "I may not be exactly a gentleman, Miss Reed," he had returned with the utmost sangfroid, "but"— At this moment he had caught sight of his sister's eye, fixed on him with a look in which rage and consternation were strangely blended; and breaking off abruptly, he had left Erma's side, his manly shoulders shaking visibly. Bertie had held a hasty and agitated conversation with him; and the twinly devotion which had so impressed the assembled company when the dance commenced was apparently conspicuous by its absence.

In the midst of the dance Mrs. Hadwell was seen to leave the room, hastily,

in response to a whispered message from a housemaid. When she returned her eyes were sparkling mischievously and her whole demeanour was charged with importance. Presently she beckoned confidentially to Mrs. Langham-Greene, who stood, resplendent in pale green draperies and water lilies, a most pleasing and graceful Undine. Undine approached and Titania linked her arm in hers. "My dear," she cooed, "you haven't an idea—oh, how shall I begin? You know my housekeeper, don't you? Wasn't she an old school friend of yours?"

"Not a friend, exactly," answered the elegant Undine, rather deprecatingly. "An acquaintance, rather. Such an ugly little thing and so lacking in any sort of brightness and attractiveness"—

"To us yes!" purred Titania. "But only think of a man like General Shaftan having cared so much for her that he was unable to die without seeing her and imploring her for the last time to become his wife"— She paused and viewed the crimsoning Undine with a countenance absolutely devoid of guile.

"General Shaftan?" inquired her guest, turning from crimson to scarlet. "General Shaftan? Why, my dear Mrs. Hadwell"—

"I know," murmured Titania, sympathetically, casting a demure glance at the infuriated water nymph, "I know! we all thought it was you—and, no doubt, he made you think so as well! men are such dreadful deceivers—but he sent for Mrs. Waite on his death-bed and wanted to marry her."

Undine found her breath.

"My *dear* Mrs. Hadwell," she laughed, lightly. "Does it sound a probable story?"

"No; and if the poor woman, herself, had told me about it, I regret to say that I should have doubted her. But the General told his nurse and trusted her with the secret contents of his will. It was drawn up three hours before he sent for Mrs. Waite and, in it, he says that he leaves all of which he dies possessed to Amy Marion Waite in the belief that that lady will, in the next few hours, become his wife, as he hopes and intends she shall."

Mrs. Langham-Greene said nothing, but turned white and twisted the fan which she held in her long, snake-like fingers feverishly. Titania, looking at her, felt a sudden twinge of compassion and compunction. She left her with some hurried excuse.

"So," she said, slowly to herself, "so even that unscrupulous, wheedling serpent is capable of caring for somebody: and caring for him all those years, too. Am I the only woman living who—who"——

Something wet and glistening fell on her chiffon dress. She hastily wiped it away and stared in amazement.

"Getting sentimental at my age?" she inquired in stupefaction. "Here, Estelle Hadwell, don't be a fool! You've got everything you ever wanted and you're

ten times happier than anyone else you know. Think of your dresses and your jewelry and your friends and your—n-n-no, I don't know that you need think of him—not just now, at all events! But think of"—

She looked up, up the long, broad stairway, up to the big, quiet nursery. Then she smiled and tossed her head.

"I have everything, practically everything," she said, defiantly. "Everything but a sentimental experience which disappears, anyway, after six months of married life. I'm a fool, that's what I am! a discontented, ungrateful fool. The trouble with me is that I've got too much. If only—if only one of them doesn't"——

A spasm of agony crossed her face at the unwelcome thought; then she resolutely crossed the hall and opened an animated conversation with one of her numerous admirers. Lack of self-control was not one of the pretty Titania's failings.

Presently Lynn Thayer joined her, looking grave and perplexed. "May I have Mrs. Hadwell to myself for a few moments?" she asked, smiling in a rather forced way: then, putting her hand on Mrs. Hadwell's arm, she drew her aside.

"Del," she said in a low voice, "you know I am no prude and I don't make a fuss, unnecessarily, about anything; but I tell you plainly that you must speak to those young connections of yours."

"Why, what have the poor things been doing?" asked Mrs. Hadwell in amazement. "I noticed that they were awfully lively but, surely, at their age"—

"My dear Del, their conduct is outrageous. Particularly Bertie's. After all, if a boy of twenty chooses to act like a fool he simply gets severely snubbed and, in time, comes to his senses and is forgiven. But when a girl of the same age, a girl who has had every advantage, starts to act in her uncle's house like an extremely fast barmaid, why, you know as well as I do that it won't be forgotten in a hurry. What has got into them to-night I don't know; but the whole room is talking of their actions. Imagine Bertie asking that shy little recluse of a Simcoe to kiss her and pretending to weep when he hesitated"——

"*Lynn!*"

"My dear, that isn't the worst of it. She has taken about half her partners to that little alcove in the second floor hall, which is curtained off, and has treated them to a course of hoydenish flirtation which is, to say the least of it, in the poorest taste. Silly little Simcoe was bad enough, but, when it comes to Parham, one of the fastest men in the city"——

"Surely not!"

"She has been sitting up there with him for the last two dances; and she is evidently taken with him, for, when she showed me her programme and I remarked on her having promised him three dances in succession, she giggled in the most affected manner and said, 'Oh, I simply adore those sad-eyed, soft-

voiced men with reputations yards long!' and danced off before I had a chance to suggest that"——

"Why, Lynn, what can I have been thinking about to allow it? Oh, the silly child! If she must act like a goose, why couldn't she do it a little more privately? Don't laugh, Lynn: you know what I mean. And you tell me that Bert?"——

"Has been acting like a perfect fool. He even wanted to kiss me."

"Lynn! the boy must have taken leave of his senses."

"I was afraid myself that he was drunk. In fact I took the liberty of asking him if he was. He was quite angry for a moment. 'What do you mean by saying that I am drunk?' he asked. 'Oh,' I said, 'I didn't say that you *were* drunk: on the contrary I said I hoped you weren't.' 'But why should you think I was?' persisted my gentleman. So I told him that when people tried to make love to me I always thought they must be drunk. He shouted at that and explained that he was in good spirits—animal, not vegetable—and wanted to enjoy himself. I treated him to a piece of my mind, but it didn't seem to do much good."

"Isn't it extraordinary? With all their high spirits and love of fun I thought those twins were as well-bred a pair as you would want to meet. Well! I must do my duty, I suppose. Where are the miscreants, Lynn?"

"Bert is in the ballroom, trying to pacify his partners, most of whom are not pleased with him for reasons best known to themselves. Bertie, as I told you, is sitting behind a fairly thick curtain with a man who shouldn't be admitted into any respectable house."

"My dear child, don't start to lecture about that! I have enough on my hands."

She mounted the stairs with a determined but bored expression and presently descended, followed by the unrepentant Bertie who winked joyously at the stony and disapproving visage of her aunt's friend. Behind them strolled the redoubtable Parham, apparently highly amused.

Mrs. Hadwell entered the ballroom and looked about for Bert. He was presently discovered in the act of fanning an indignant-looking lady who pretended to ignore his efforts at small talk. Mrs. Hadwell beckoned and he sprang to his feet with alacrity.

"Bert!" said his aunt by marriage, sternly, "there are limits to my forbearance. I am sorry to say that you have transgressed those limits. I am still sorrier that you have no better taste than to take pleasure in showing impertinence to my guests."

Bert's face worked for a moment: he said something in an aside to his sister, then spoke.

"Aunt Del," he said, humbly but with an irrepressible twinkle in his black eyes, "we have acted like a couple of demons, I must admit, but, if you'll only

forgive us this once, I swear we'll straighten things out. Every one is going to supper, now; well, Bertie and I are going in together and, just as soon as the people are seated, you will see what will happen."

"I will not," was Mrs. Hadwell's unexpected rejoinder. "I have had quite enough nonsense, Bert. It must end, here."

Bert consulted his sister with his eyes; then, catching his diminutive aunt by the waist, he whirled her down the room and whispered something in her ear. She gasped, then suddenly laughed and looked relieved; and Bertie approached and entered into an animated conversation with her.

Five minutes later, when the assembled company was seated at supper, the unruly and ostracized pair walked solemnly in and stood for a moment at the head of the room. Then Bert raised his crimson-decked arm with a mute request for silence. A hush of surprise fell on the revellers. He spoke.

"My dear friends," he said, gravely, "my sister and I have acted so badly to-night and have laid ourselves open to so much well-deserved censure that we think the least we can do is to apologize, and we do it—thus!"

He deliberately laid hold of his companion's snowy locks and, with a vigorous pull, exposed a close cropped head. Then he doffed his crimson headgear and a dark tress fell athwart his nose.

When the prolonged shrieks of amazement and laughter had died into silence Bert—the real Bert—spoke.

"My sister says that if all the girls whom she has kissed will forgive her she will never do it, again," he said. "And, as for me," he paused and cast a glance of pure delight in the direction of Messrs. Simcoe and Parham, "as for me, while I must confess that I am a horrible flirt"—

He could get no further.

An hour later Undine, looking paler than her wont, sat whispering behind a large fan to two or three other women. One of them, a pleasant-faced middle-aged woman, looked distinctly sad and uncomfortable.

"The poor girl!" she said.

"Such people should be exposed," returned Undine, coldly. "The idea of her being here at all. Mrs. Hadwell cannot associate with fast women and expect to keep her own character. Personally I never think there is any real harm in Mrs. Hadwell, though"— She paused tentatively while a venomous gleam lit her large, pale eyes.

"Oh, no, no!" cried the others in horrified unison; and Mrs. Langham-Greene saw that it would be dangerous to venture further. She bade an affectionate farewell to her hostess and ordered a closed sleigh.

"My dress is so thin," she explained, smiling.

As the sleigh drove away she crouched among the fur rugs and bit her naked arms and writhed.

"I'll pay them for this," she whispered, catching her breath in torture. "He sent for her—for her! and that little cat dared to tell me to my face—oh, I can't reach her, not yet; but I can hurt her through her friend, anyway. She really cares for the Thayer girl; it'll make trouble with her pompous old husband when she insists on supporting her—oh, I'll do what I can! it may help me to forget." She groaned. "Oh, I can't bear it: I didn't mind his death as I mind this! it's like losing him all over again—I'll pay her for what she's made me suffer to-night! *I'll pay her!*"

CHAPTER XXI

A LIE WHICH IS PART A TRUTH

"A lie which is part a truth is ever the blackest of lies,
A lie which is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight."
—*Tennyson.*

Mrs. Langham-Greene's pretty town house possessed a drawing-room as elegant as its mistress, and far less harmful. It was flanked by two bay windows, admirably adapted for gazing on the peccadilloes of one's neighbours, the while one ruminated contentedly on one's own virtues. Here its fair owner loved to sit on winter afternoons, dispensing excellent tea and gossip: and here one bright January day found her brewing the witching potion for a waiting guest. This was no other than Gerald Amherst, who happened to be painting the lady's portrait. When the daylight faded she had insisted on his accompanying her home and joining her in a cup of five o'clock tea. The fair widow was not an especial favourite of the artist's; but his stock of excuses had been exhausted on previous occasions and he had therefore submitted meekly.

Mrs. Langham-Greene was a woman who wore well, as the saying is. Her figure was straight and supple as a girl of twenty's and her delicate features had escaped the pinched look which frequently accompanies thinness in a woman

of fifty. Her skin had always been colourless and now resembled fine ivory; her hair, which she wore parted in the middle in the Madonna style, was only very slightly flecked with grey. Julia Langham-Greene was a distinguished woman, an interesting woman, an elegant woman. When, at thirty-five, she had first donned widow's weeds, she had created such a furore that it was many years before she found herself able to relinquish them. However, when a woman reaches forty and finds herself capable of wearing pale blue and scarlet to advantage—she usually does.

Mrs. Langham-Greene was now forty-seven, yet she could attend a fancy dress ball attired in Nile green and pearls and look the part of Undine to perfection. Small wonder, then, that she wished to transfer such lasting charms to still more lasting canvas; and Amherst had attained distinction as a portrait painter years before. She smiled delicately on him now, as she sugared his tea and inquired in tones of melted honey whether he took cream or lemon; and pondered inwardly how best to land the shaft she held in store.

"You are too good," she purred, in response to a perfunctory compliment on his part. "Far too good. Among so many young and pretty girls I fear I must have been quite unnoticed. Miss Reed, for instance! What regular features she has; quite ideal! What a pity that she has so little conversation! and such poor taste in dress. And is it true that her father has fits and that her mother was a house-maid before he married her?"

"I never heard that," returned Amherst, opening his honest eyes in amazement. "Miss Reed is a striking looking girl, but, to my mind, Miss Ladilaw is far prettier."

"But so uninteresting, don't you think?"

"Not more so than the majority of very young girls."

"Still," pursued Mrs. Langham-Greene, thoughtfully, "she is a nice lady-like little thing. I daresay she will marry young; she is so naive and pretty. It is not likely that she will hang on year after year like that poor, plain cousin of hers."

"Surely you don't mean Miss Thayer?"

"I mention no names," said the widow, archly: then her face dropped, pathetically. "I should not like to say one thing about that poor, misguided girl that might sound unkind,—poor creature, she has enough to bear."

"I don't understand you," said Gerald, flushing angrily.

"Ah, you men are so gallant," commented the widow, smiling a little sorrowfully. "I am told that the things gentlemen say about Miss Thayer when they are alone could not be repeated in a lady's hearing."

"Whoever told you that, Mrs. Greene," replied Gerald, forgetting the hyphened adjunct in his fury, "is an uncommonly first class liar. The things that *gentlemen* say about Miss Thayer could be repeated in the hearing of St. Peter."

"My dear Mr. Amherst, you have lifted a weight from my mind. Is it possible that there are men in this world so—so kindly that they refrain from unpleasant comment on a woman of that kind even when the refining influence of ladies' society"——

"A woman of that kind! Unpleasant comment! I don't know what in the—what in thunder you can mean, Mrs. Greene; and, if you will kindly inform me in as few words as possible"——

"I?"

Mrs. Langham-Greene drew her slender figure up haughtily and regarded her interrogator with stately yet grieved amazement.

"*I? I* repeat scandal—I spread scandal about another woman? a woman, too, who, in spite of the fact, that she must be fully thirty, has not yet been able to secure a husband to protect her? Indeed, Mr. Amherst, you must not think that you can drag me into this. You quite forget yourself if you suppose that I am willing to discuss such questionable things. If you choose to delve into these unpleasant matters it shall not be in my drawing-room."

Mr. Amherst surveyed her in silence.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Greene," he said, courteously, "but was not the matter first referred to in your drawing-room, and by you?"

"If," said Mrs. Langham-Greene, rather sadly, "if I allowed an expression of sympathy for the unfortunate girl to escape me, I did not expect to be reproached for it, Mr. Amherst."

Amherst, despite his indignation, began to feel a little abashed. After all, the woman *had* done nothing but mention Lynn pityingly; but why she or any one else should——

He pulled himself together and spoke, quietly.

"I gained the impression from what you said, Mrs. Greene, that there were unpleasant rumours afloat concerning Miss Thayer. Won't you tell me what they are?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Amherst," murmured the lady, distressfully. "I couldn't, really."

"Can't you give me an idea of them?"

"But, Mr. Amherst, you must know something. Why, the very servants talk of it. My butler and housemaid"——

"Yes? Not having the pleasure of either your housemaid's or your butler's acquaintance, I am still grievously in the dark. Has anyone else mentioned the matter to you?"

"Why, everyone. I supposed, of course, that you knew, that you had heard of it long ago or, believe me, I should never have mentioned it. Of course if it were another man—if it were even a gentleman—it would not be quite so awful. But a villainous, sickly little foreigner like Ricossia"——

"What?"

"There. You have actually dragged the name out of me," cried Mrs. Langham-Green, indignantly. "I declare! Men are perfectly horrid. They *will* not let you be charitable and kind and keep things to yourself. That poor girl! I suppose you will be just as hard on her as all the others. I was so indignant, the other day, with Mr. Parham. He said—but really I had better not repeat it"——

"Stop!"

Amherst rose to his feet, breathing heavily.

"Parham, was it? I'll remember that," he said in quiet, metallic tones. "In the meantime, Mrs. Greene, you must tell me what you mean. What is this story?"

"Oh, my dear Mr. Amherst, I *cannot* spread scandal," cried his hostess, anxiously. "Do sit down and have another cup of tea. Tea is so soothing when one—I felt just as you do when I first heard it. It does seem so strange that such a plain girl couldn't conduct herself like a lady. Of course if she were at all good-looking so that people noticed her and sought her out it might—oh, you're not going, already?"

"Yes, I'm going to hunt up Mr. Parham," said Gerald, searching blindly for his hat.

"No, oh, no. Oh, but I insist. Well, rather than have you run off like that I'll tell you the whole truth—all that I know, that is. It seems that—you know that Miss Thayer and Ricossia were always together when he came here first, two years ago. It was quite a joke; such a difference in their ages, you know; and he so handsome and she, poor girl, so plain! and it does seem as though it must be her fault, for certainly he never appeared to encourage her"——

"Go on, for God's sake!"

"Mr. Amherst, I must beg of you not to use profane language," observed Mrs. Langham-Greene with dignity. "Well, where was I? oh, yes! well, when he disappeared from polite society and we were all obliged to give him the cold shoulder because he was so openly depraved—not like some people whom one *can* know because they keep quiet about it—but he had no savoir faire, that is to say, no shame"——

"Mrs. Greene," shouted Amherst, "won't you please skip Ricossia and get to Miss Thayer?"

The widow reared herself like a black-and-golden snake, about to strike. Her green eyes gleamed; then she recollected herself and smiled, subtly.

"Dear Mr. Amherst, pray allow me to tell the story in my own way. I really cannot be interrupted in this abrupt fashion. I was coming to Miss Thayer. It seems that the wicked girl, instead of dropping him when he was found out, as all the rest of us did, continued to meet him secretly. He evidently was not sufficiently enamoured to pursue her very much, but you know how it is! a

woman of that age who has never succeeded in marrying frequently loses all hope and simply doesn't care what she does; so she used to visit him at night in some awful slum where he lived"—

"What utter absurdity!"

"My dear Mr. Amherst," said the widow with angelic patience, "you may be sure that I should not readily believe such things of another woman. Unfortunately, however, the misguided girl was seen and recognized, not only by my butler but by people of her own class; people who could hardly believe their eyes and who, in their anxiety not to condemn her rashly, followed her home—at a safe distance, of course. Not that she went home, directly: I am told that her practice was to take a sleigh to a lonely part of Pine Avenue, dismiss it there and walk to her uncle's house. Very dangerous, too! fancy a lady walking alone after dark. Once, when I first lost my husband, I was compelled by some mischance to traverse two blocks one evening without an escort. Some men passed me and one of them made some remark about the 'bewitching widow.' I don't know how I ever reached home; but, as soon as I did, I retired, immediately. Next morning I sent for my doctor: he advised rest and plenty of light nourishment—what, you're going? Good evening, Mr. Amherst: so sorry we drifted into these unpleasant subjects. *Good* evening!"

Ten minutes later Gerald rang the Thayers' bell.

"No, Miss Thayer is not at home. I don't believe she will be in to-night, for she is dining at Mrs. Hadwell's. Certainly, sir: I'll tell her."

CHAPTER XXII
WHISPERING TONGUES

"Whispering tongues can poison truth,
And constancy dwells in realms above,
And life is thorny—and youth is vain—
And to be wroth with one we love
Doth work like madness on the brain."
—*Coleridge.*

"Yes, the dear twins have gone at last. Whether or no they are leaving their

young hearts here I can't say, but they are certainly carrying two very nice ones away with them. Except that the female one is chiefly ice; but really, Erma quite thawed toward the end. Odd that he preferred her to Agatha: she's no better looking and not half so popular—by the way, Lynn, talking of Agatha reminds me! what in the world have you done to Lighton?"

"My dear Del!"

"Refused him, again?"

"He has not, thanks be, compelled me to do so."

"Then what has happened? I've seen him six times with Agatha in the past ten days. Oh, Lynn, why can't you be sensible? To let such a thing slip through your fingers! Upon my word you make me feel sometimes like a donkey boy with a goad."

"And you, my love, make *me* feel like Mephisto with a pitchfork."

"Oh, Lynn! And, at all events, if you don't want to marry him, now, why tell him so? You may be very glad of him a few years hence. Why not keep him hanging on?"

"Because, dear friend, I am neither a liar nor a cheat."

"Well, why aren't you? What's the use of trying to be honest in a world of liars and cheats? What do you expect to gain by it?"

"I really can't say. The reward of virtue, perhaps."

"The reward of virtue, dearest, is usually a whack over the head."

"So I have observed."

"Is that why you are so desperately anxious to obtain it?"

"Not exactly."

"What do you propose to do when it arrives?"

"Look and act as though it were the one thing on earth I had always longed for. Unless it is violent enough to stun me, in which case I shall set my teeth and say nothing."

"Lynn, you're a fool!"

"I have frequently suspected as much."

"And oh, Lynn, I chatter and chatter—and all the time there is something I must say to you."

"Say it."

"Do you know what it is?"

"No; but, whatever it may be, Del, hurry up and tell me. You know suspense is the one thing I can't bear."

"Will you let me ask you something?"

"Anything—but I won't promise to answer."

"Will you answer me this? Have you ever cared for anyone?"

"Yes."

"Any man, I mean!"

"Yes."

"Much?"

"Very much."

"Enough—well, enough to do anything foolish for?"

"Enough to do things that you would consider would qualify me for a madhouse."

"Ah!"

Mrs. Hadwell drew a long breath and her face fell.

"You might have told me, dear," she said, gently.

"I couldn't, Del. But, anyway, it's not what you think. Why do you ask me all this?"

"Was that why you refused Lighton?"

"No—yes; I would have refused him, anyhow."

"But the other had something to do with it?" said Mrs. Hadwell, leaning forward, breathlessly.

Lynn said nothing but her face was sad. Although she felt that her secret must die with her brother she longed to-night for the sympathy which she could so easily obtain from this, her oldest and dearest friend.

"I—I would have liked to tell you, Del," she said in a low voice. "But—I had promised to tell no one. It was not that I didn't trust you. The circumstances were peculiar. I had others to consider."

"Oh, Lynn, Lynn, it was some one that you couldn't marry, then?" Mrs. Hadwell's voice rose almost to a wail.

"Yes. But, Del, the more you say, the less you understand. Let us talk of something else."

"Lynn, I can't! Oh, do tell me just one thing more: you know that you can trust me. Have you done anything that was unconventional? stupidly unconventional? that might expose you to scandalous comments if it were known?"

"I—yes, I am afraid I have. But don't talk of it, Del. I don't feel very cheerful to-night."

"But I must. Lynn, will you promise solemnly never again to do anything foolish—you know what I mean?—anything improper or reckless?"

Lynn was silent.

"Promise. Oh, Lynn, promise! You don't know what danger you're in. You have enemies; you are already talked about in certain circles. I won't ask a question, dear, not a question: only promise"——

"Del, I can promise nothing."

"You—you would do foolish things again?"

"Yes."

"But, why—oh, Lynn, why?"

It was some moments before Lynn answered and, when she did, her voice was hard.

"Because all my happiness on earth—everything in life that counts—depends on my outraging certain very sensible conventions. Don't worry if you can help it: I'm a fly, caught in the web of Fate: you can't help me, I can't help myself. If I—stopped, I should never forgive myself: I should never know another happy moment."

"Lynn, I see I shall have to tell you—and it's a thing I hate to do. There are stories afloat concerning you—I don't know what, exactly—coupling your name with that of Ricossia."

Lynn grew slowly white.

"Have you nothing to say, Lynn?"

"Nothing, Del."

"You won't explain—not even to me?"

"Del," said her visitor, suddenly, bending forward and gazing intently in Mrs. Hadwell's face, "if you had to face some personal trouble or misunderstanding, amounting to disgrace, even—or break a solemn and sacred oath—which would you do?"

"Break the solemn and sacred oath," returned Mrs. Hadwell, promptly and cheerfully.

"Ah," said Lynn, despairingly, "what's the use of asking you, Del? You have no conscience about those things."

"No, indeed; yet I am rich enough to afford one if I really wanted it. But you, my dear, have no business with so costly and useless an appendage. Can't you get rid of it—for the present, anyway? It's going to land you in a perfect sea of trouble; and, beyond, shining faintly, is that whack over the head of which we spoke. When you have tormented yourself sufficiently Society will hand you that; and then I suppose you will have nothing left to wish for?"

"Only death; and I'm pretty healthy!"

"And you will not explain? in spite of all I can say or do?"

"No, I'm very tired, Del. I'm going now, if you don't mind."

Half an hour later Amherst left Hadwell Heights, scowling unhappily. Miss Thayer had just left; she had had a headache and had returned early. He could not, in decency, call on her at her home after hearing this, much as he wanted to. He must wait until to-morrow.

He walked along Pine Avenue with his hands in his overcoat pockets. Lynn was the best girl that ever lived; but, after all, there was no smoke without fire, that was certain. She had committed some imprudence; what, he must find out before he took any steps to circumvent these slanders. Of course one thing was

undeniable; she had bestowed a good deal of attention on Ricossia when she first met him. It was through her and her warm eulogies of his genius and beauty that he, himself, had first become interested in the young—but, after all, the boy couldn't live a year and he must not call him what he really was. What beauty he possessed! the beauty of the very devil! and how women did go mad over him! It wasn't wonderful if—

Then suddenly, like poison, Ricossia's low, bell-like laugh at their last meeting rang in his ears. And his words—what were they? He had said that Lynn was not attracted by him in the ordinary way—bah! any one a degree above a cur would say that. Lynn loved him, Amherst, that was certain; but there were different kinds and degrees of love. Had he not seen a kind sweet woman, a devoted wife and mother, leave home, husband, children, everything that made her life; had he not seen her ready to pay with a life-time of odium and desolation for the feverish joy of a few anxious months? Lynn had a stronger nature than the majority of women; that was nothing; she would be likely to go to greater extremes for that very reason. She was so sensible, so logical, so prudent—were they not the very women who forsook all caution when vitally interested? Ricossia was a boy, a child; yes, and had it not passed into a proverb, the love of a woman of thirty for a youth?—what was he thinking of? where had his fancies led him? Doubt Lynn! Lynn, whom he had known from a child!—yes, known! the mockery of the word! Who ever knew another human being? Strangers we wandered into life; strangers we left it; strangers we were, each to other, always; husband to wife, child to mother—above all, lover to beloved. He groaned as he walked, but no feeling of resentment toward his betrothed held place as yet. Lynn, as he had told her, was the one woman on earth to him: he would abide by her explanation. If—he turned cold and faint at the thought—if, in the past, she had been infatuated with that "half-devil and half-child," Ricossia; and, if she had done foolish things, mad things ... yes, even wrong things—he could forgive them, knowing that she loved him, and him only, now. After all, when one considered Ricossia's reputation, merely to be seen with him was enough; and she had, probably, traded unduly on her social position and good name. Perhaps it was nothing more than pity; the boy was dying and he was so young, so friendless. On the whole Amherst decided that he was probably acting like a fool; one might almost as well be jealous of a corpse as of Ricossia, who might be one at that moment for anything he knew to the contrary. With a sudden rush of compunction and self-reproach Amherst left Pine Avenue and, descending to the city, hailed a passing car. He would look the boy up; confound it all, the young fool might be dying a miserable death at this very moment while he maundered away like a simpleton in a melodrama. He would see how Ricossia was holding out, anyway; this last cold spell wasn't just the best thing for a consumptive, and he would like to

see the cub spend his last months on earth in comparative comfort, whether he deserved to or not. And, perhaps—but no! he couldn't touch on that—not with him!

The car took him within a few blocks of his destination. He walked slowly on, feeling cheered and comparatively happy. When one has writhed in doubt and misery for a certain number of hours the reaction is usually strong; and Amherst wondered how he had ever come to attach so much importance to the babblings of a green-eyed tabby cat and the insults of a hound. He inhaled the clear night air with calm enjoyment; to-morrow he would see Lynn and then—and then—

He had nearly reached the Chatham when the door opened quietly and a woman descended the steps. As she advanced toward him she raised her head in a blind, unseeing sort of fashion. The light of a flickering gas jet shone clearly and pitilessly on her upturned face; a face which, though drawn and hollow-eyed, was strangely familiar—the face of his intended wife, Lynn Thayer.

CHAPTER XXIII
WHEN LOVE IS DONE

"The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one—
Yet the light of the whole life dies
When love is done."
—*Old Song.*

"I love—but I believe in love no more."—*Shelley.*

Lunn recognized him almost immediately and stood quite still, looking into his face with a curious deliberation and intentness.

"One would almost think you had expected me," said Amherst, involuntarily. One seldom says what is uppermost in one's mind on these occasions.

"I think I did," said Lynn with equal quietness. "When I awoke this morning something told me that this would happen."

"There is a cab-stand a few blocks away," he continued, courteously. "May

I take you there and see you into one?"

"I shall be—grateful for the attention," said Lynn, dully: then she laughed.

They walked in silence for a block or two.

"Have you anything to say to me, Lynn?" said Amherst at last.

"I—nothing!"

"You prefer to say nothing?"

Lynn was silent for a moment; then she spoke very distinctly.

"On the night that you asked me to marry you, I said all that I was at liberty to say."

"Ricossia is rather exacting, isn't he?"

The sneer escaped Gerald, wrung from him by his pain. Lynn started slightly but made no answer.

"I should ask your pardon," Amherst went on, presently. "I had no right to say that. I do not even know that it is Ricossia on whom you paid this late call. Possibly you have other friends in the Chatham."

"I have not."

"It—it is Ricossia?"

She threw back her head and laughed.

"Exactly—it is Ricossia. And, by the way, Mr. Amherst, although I know that when one does an unconventional thing, 'gentlemen' are quite justified in insulting one; yet, as there is a policeman on the next corner, and as even a homeless cur isn't obliged to stand still while some one throws a rock at it—will you leave me?"

"No. Lynn, forgive me. I'm crazy; I don't know what I'm saying. If it were anyone else—if it were any other man—anyone, anyone but that villainous little blackguard"——

"Stop!"

Lynn turned on him like a tigress, her eyes blazing with fury.

"How dare you call him that?" she cried. "A genius! a god of beauty! and dying at that! What sort of man do you call yourself to insult first the woman who was to have been your wife and then a dying man."

Amherst gasped and caught his breath in painful amazement.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned like a hurt animal, "how you must love him, Lynn!"

They had passed the cab-stand now and had turned toward home, but neither noticed this. Amherst's face was ghastly and his steps unsteady; but Lynn walked erect and stately like a sable figure of doom.

When some blocks had been traversed in silence Amherst spoke, slowly and humbly.

"Lynn, I should not have spoken as I did. We're all human and I'm not your

judge. If I didn't love you—if I hadn't believed that you loved me—I should not have been so harsh. Will you let me walk home with you? We probably shan't see one another again very soon and there is so much I want to say."

"No."

"You won't let me? You compel me to—very well, I'll go to Ricossia, then; I'll make him listen to reason and, and if he won't, I'll"——

"Gerald!"

Lynn's voice was alive with a sudden, horrible fear.

"Gerald," she said swiftly, clasping his arm with her hands, "you loved me once, didn't you? For the sake of that, because of that, will you do me a favour? Deal with me, alone. I'm strong, I can stand anything. Say what you please to me, do as you think best—but let him alone. He's so young, he—he's so weak—and he's dying, Gerald, dying. He may be dead, to-morrow. While he lives, let him alone. Oh, Gerald, promise me!"

Amherst could not speak for a moment. When he did his voice had altered.

"Lynn," said he, gently, "why did you promise to marry me?"

"Because I loved you, Gerald."

"You still say that—now?"

"Yes. My love for him was quite another thing. I can't explain, and I don't expect you to understand."

"I see—I think I see. The other was a—well, a sort of obsession."

"Exactly. You could hit on no better word."

"Yet you believed that you loved me. You think that you could care for two men at once?"

She moistened her dry lips and spoke, feebly.

"If I had not been so alone in the world, Gerald, I might have loved several. There are so many different loves, you know; differing in kind and in degree. The love for a father, for a son, for a brother"—her face lightened with sudden hope,—"that was really what I felt for him, Gerald; the love that a mother has for a son, the love that a sister has for a brother—don't you, oh, can't you, understand? I loved you in quite another way—it's so different—and, if I tried to explain any more, I should break a solemn oath—I should bring a curse on my head"——

Amherst's face lit with a sudden, heated gleam. He turned and spoke fiercely.

"Lynn! Don't insult my intelligence by telling me stuff of that sort, but listen! Promise that you'll never see him again, and that you'll do your best to forget him! Promise that he'll be nothing to you in the future! and I'll forgive all the rest. Come to me! I want you. I won't ask you a question, not a question. Marry me to-morrow and I'll kill the first man—or woman—who breathes a word against you. Lynn!"

She held her breath and looked at him as though fascinated.

"Lynn! Promise!"

She spoke, slowly and with difficulty.

"Until he dies, Gerald—my life is his."

"Then"——

Amherst's face flushed, a dark, purplish flush, ugly to see.

"You prefer him then to reputation, honour, common sense and decency." His breath came heavily. "You prefer him—to me!"

As slowly and deliberately as before she answered him.

"I love you—as a woman loves the man she means to marry. I love L—Ricossia—as I love no other being on God's earth—as I do not believe any other man was ever loved from the beginning of time. You say rightly. I prefer him—and the oath at which you sneer—to reputation—honour—common sense—decency—and you! Good-bye, Gerald; try to forget me."

CHAPTER XXIV

MRS. LANGHAM-GREENE PAYS HER DEBT; AND MRS. WAITE, HERS

"The long-necked geese of the world that are
ever hissing dispraise
Because their natures are little."
—*Tennyson.*

Estelle Hadwell was sitting by a blazing fire in her husband's library when she heard voices in the hall below, followed by the banging of a door. Then Mr. Hadwell called loudly:

"Estelle! are you there?"

"Yes, dear," replied his wife, somewhat surprised. "Have you visitors?"

"Yes. Mrs. Langham-Greene and Mrs. Tollman are here. Can you come down?"

"Yes, indeed!" replied Mrs. Hadwell with effusion. She rose slowly from her chair by the fire, grimacing disgustedly as she did so. The library was so nice and Mrs. Greene so horrid and Mrs. Tollman such a bore.

She hurried down and advanced with extended hands and a delighted smile. She had got as far as "A most delightful surprise—an unexpected pleasure!" when she caught sight of her husband's face.

"Henry!" she exclaimed in genuine consternation. "What in the world is it?"

Her husband was standing with his back to the fireplace and a portentous frown on his brow, looking, as Mrs. Hadwell reflected to herself, for all the world like the British Matron in trousers.

"Henry, what is it?" she asked, again.

"These ladies," returned Mr. Hadwell with a majestic wave of his hand, "can tell you better than I."

Estelle glanced from one to the other, wonderingly. Mrs. Tollman, a stout, pleasant-faced woman, wore a somewhat distressed expression and sat stiffly upright. Mrs. Langham-Greene, delicately lovely in dark blue velvet and ermine, leaned gracefully back in an easy chair, her fine features composed to an expression of decorous sorrow. Neither lady made any immediate effort to enlighten her hostess until Mrs. Greene swept a meaning glance at her companion from beneath her long, light lashes. Then Mrs. Tollman spoke.

"It's such a delicate matter, Mrs. Hadwell," she said in a flurried way. "I disliked coming to you about it, very much; but Mr. Hadwell insisted, saying that only an eye-witness could convince you."

"Of what?"

"This is so hard on us, both," Mrs. Langham-Greene murmured, soothingly. "And it was so careless of me to mention the poor thing; for then Mr. Hadwell simply dragged the whole story out of me. I am most distressed, I am indeed!"

"But at what, dear Mrs. Greene?" cooed her hostess.

"Oh, at the whole affair—the poor girl so well connected and all! and Ricossia so common and dreadful."

"Oh, some new scandal about young Ricossia," exclaimed Mrs. Hadwell with sudden enlightenment and a corresponding sinking of the heart.

"But he is not common; no one could call him that. Dreadful, certainly; but rather fascinating in his way, don't you think?"

"Apparently others have found him so," drawled the older lady, meaningly.

"What others?"

Mrs. Langham-Greene looked deliberately at Mrs. Hadwell and spoke, regretfully.

"I am afraid, dear Mrs. Hadwell, that your friend, Miss Thayer"——

"How dare you say so?"

"Estelle," said her husband, reprovingly, "is it likely that these ladies would speak without proper authority?"

"Very likely indeed," thought their hostess, but her heart was sick within her. Lynn's interest in Ricossia; her lack of interest in other men; her sorrow, her preoccupation, her confession of having outraged propriety; all these ranged as witnesses against her in her friend's heart.

"I knew—I told Mr. Hadwell that you would take it in just this way," murmured the widow, sympathetically. "So he insisted that we bring an eye-witness to convince you. Of course the thing has been going on for an indefinite space of time; but, just lately, Mr. and Mrs. Tollman, when returning home late one night, saw Miss Thayer leaving the Chatham. They followed her. She took a sleigh to Pine Avenue, dismissed it there and walked home. Isn't it so, Mrs. Tollman?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Tollman, fluttering. "It is undeniably true. But I don't know how it ever got out, for I only told my most intimate friends about it."

"That was cheaper than having it printed in the 'Daily News' and certainly quite as effective."

Mrs. Hadwell had lost her usual calm and diplomacy.

"Really," she continued with a sudden burst of candour, "really how I do hate women! They're every bit as nasty as men, and nothing like so nice into the bargain. I wish I need never see a woman again—except Lynn."

This coming from the politic and tactful Mrs. Hadwell had the effect of a thunderclap. Before her listeners had recovered the housemaid announced Mrs. Waite and that lady entered.

Since inheriting her legacy, Mrs. Hadwell's former housekeeper had hired a small furnished house and was living there alone. General Shaftan's house, her property, was advertised for sale; a proceeding which had roused some interest in Montreal society.

"How funny of her not to live there until it sells or rents! Can it be that that sourfaced woman is afraid of ghosts?" some had asked.

She stood now in the doorway, looking from one to the other with her peculiarly cold and expressionless manner. "Excuse me," she said without preliminary, "but as I was walking through the hall just now I heard what you were saying; I could not help hearing. Is it true that Miss Thayer is in trouble?"

"Are you interested in Miss Thayer?" inquired Mrs. Langham-Greene with courtly insolence.

"Yes."

The two women faced one another in silence; the one beautiful, patrician, elegant; the other, plain, sad-faced, and, apparently, old. A whole world lay between them; nor was the chasm bridged by the fact that both had loved the same man. Mrs. Hadwell, with her usual quick intuition, could feel the air charged with import and longed to know what lay beneath these different exteriors. Instead she turned to Mrs. Langham-Greene with a question.

"May I ask what your object was in laying these slanders about Miss Thayer before me?" she said.

"I wished," said the other slowly, "to see what could be done to help the wretched girl. Of course she cannot stay here; and I understand that there is a great dearth of teachers in the North-West; they are not particular there as to character and"—

"You cat!" screamed little Mrs. Hadwell, losing all control of herself. "How dare you come to my house and compel me to be rude to your very face? How dare you speak so of my best friend? Who wants to hear your opinion of her? why, it's an impertinence on your part to have an opinion about a girl like Lynn. Let me tell you that Miss Thayer need not go to the North-West for a refuge; she will always find a welcome in my home whenever she needs one"—

"Not in mine!"

Mrs. Hadwell started and looked at her husband with amazement.

"You wish me to drop Lynn? My dear Henry, if you are thinking of setting up in the ostracizing business I can supply you with a long list of far more deserving cases."

"I don't say that the girl is actually bad, but she has been proved to be utterly devoid of sense or decency. She shall never set foot in my house again."

"In that case," Mrs. Hadwell's voice was calm—"I leave your house to-night and take my children with me."

"What?"

"They are all under seven and until that age the mother has full control. I shall take them to my grandmother in Lachine; there, at least, I can receive my friends—my one friend, I should say! I haven't another."

Mr. Hadwell stamped out of the room in a fury. Mrs. Tollman and Mrs. Greene followed him quietly, the former almost in tears, the latter composed and cheerful. When the door closed on them Mrs. Hadwell sat down and burst into tears.

"Oh, Lynn, Lynn, how could you?" she sobbed.

"Mrs. Hadwell, can you give me this Mr. Ricossia's address?"

Mrs. Waite's cold, thin voice sounded unpleasantly at Estelle's elbow.

"Yes, I believe it's the Chatham, either 10 or 12 St. Eustache St.," answered the younger woman, staring through wet eyes in sheer amazement. "Are you there, still, Mrs. Waite? I thought you had gone."

"Don't—don't mind so much," said the "Gorgon-faced automaton" with difficulty. "Perhaps something can be done."

"Oh, nothing, nothing, I am afraid, except to stand by her."

"You believe this story?"

"No!" lied Mrs. Hadwell, firmly.

"Neither do I. I am sure there is some explanation if one could only find out what it is. And I have plenty of money, now; money can do a great deal sometimes in cases of this kind, and there is nothing I would sooner spend it on"——

"You—you? But, Mrs. Waite—if you don't mind my asking—why should you—what is Lynn to you?"

Mrs. Waite moistened her dry lips and spoke, faintly.

"I had a child once. He died.... She was his teacher and—and she was good to him. But don't tell her; she might try to talk to me about him and—and I couldn't stand that"——

Mrs. Waite stopped; her plain face contorted ludicrously. The next moment the cold Mrs. Hadwell and the woman beside whose frigid nature her own showed in the light of a volcano were weeping bitterly in one another's arms.

CHAPTER XXV
THE SHADOWS FALL

"All the dreaming is broken through,
Both what is done and undone I rue,
Nothing is tender, nothing true,
In heaven or earth save God and you."
—*Arthur Sullivan.*

"But still the faces gaped and cried,
'Give us the dream for which we died!'"
—Charles G. D. Roberts.

Mrs. Hadwell, having hypnotized Mr. Hadwell into apologizing profusely for his conduct, promised to forgive him if he would go away for a week.

"You have been talking for years of paying a visit to your sister in Toronto," she said. "Suppose you go now, Henry. She will be delighted to see you, and I—after a week of absence I shall be so glad to see you, again, that I shall not even think of this. Otherwise"——

He went. When Estelle had seen him safely in the train she drew a long

breath of relief and telephoned to Miss Thayer. Until then she had not dared to risk an encounter between her friend and her husband, knowing that the former was a keen observer and the latter, a poor actor.

"Come to me, to-morrow, as soon as school is out, dear," she said. "I shall be in all afternoon. Promise!"

"Oh, yes, I shall come, Del," assented the other, quietly. Mrs. Hadwell, listening sorrowfully, thought she could detect a note of unaccustomed grief in Lynn's voice. She endeavoured to forget it, however, and, giving orders to admit no visitors that evening, sat in front of the library fire, cudgelling her brains for some method of rehabilitating her friend in public favour. Although a woman of great resource and audacity none occurred to her; the case was too hopeless.

"Let me see," she said, judicially, "what are the facts—the known facts? First: Lynn, who is a great favourite with men but who shows partiality to none, develops an enthusiastic fancy for an unknown genius who arrives in Montreal two years ago. She works night and day to induce her friends to take him up; she takes long walks and drives in his society; and is frequently seen holding absorbed conversations with him in out-of-the-way places. She puffs his writings untiringly; she persists in ignoring his open faults; she makes excuses for his bad habits. True, he is only a child in years. Then he turns out to be utterly depraved; everyone drops him; she grows white and thin, refuses to discuss him even with me and is seen talking with him after he has been practically ostracised by all reputable people. This is a year ago. She, who has hitherto loved society and revelled in every sort of outdoor exercise, suddenly takes to refusing all invitations and losing interest in all sports. To-day half a dozen unimpeachable witnesses—and dear knows how many others—are ready to swear that they have seen her leave his extremely dubious place of residence, late at night. Oh, Lynn, Lynn, my dear stupid child, how could you? What *can* I do for you? If they were even people who could be bought—who could be bribed to swear that they had lied!—oh, I give it up! I may as well telephone to Mrs. Waite and see if she has any ideas."

"Is that you, Mrs. Waite? Yes, it is I, Mrs. Hadwell. No, I have not seen Miss Thayer yet but she is coming up to-morrow afternoon. I don't know; I am most unhappy about it. Yes, to-morrow afternoon. Oh, why?"

"Because," answered Mrs. Waite, quietly, "I think I have discovered something. Do not, on any account, let Miss Thayer know, or you may spoil everything. No, I can tell you nothing. I have your permission to bring him? then I shall say good-night."

"Most tantalising," muttered Estelle as she hung up the receiver. "Still, as everything is as bad already as it can well be, nothing can make it much worse. How truly comforting! Who is the person she wants to bring, I wonder! and how

can he help poor Lynn? A plea of insanity is the only solution that occurs to me. But I'll stand by her—and, in the meantime, I'll drink a pint of porter and see if that will make me sleep."

It did; and at four o'clock the next day Mrs. Hadwell greeted her friend with an intensity of feeling that was almost solemn.

"You poor child!" she said, as she kissed her.

Lynn returned the kiss, listlessly, and sat down. She looked rather tired.

"So you have not yet deserted me, Del?" she said, quietly, as she loosened her wraps.

"Deserted you! Oh, Lynn, Lynn, I wouldn't desert you if you had committed murder and sacrilege. But, my child, how could you be so foolish? Why weren't you content with doing a wrong thing without going further and doing it in such a way that it had to come out? I won't reproach you for the thing, itself; I am too sick, too sorry; but why, oh why, had you"——

"Wait!"

Lynn put her hand to her forehead as though bewildered.

"Just a minute, Del. I don't quite understand. What is it that you think?"

"Don't fence with me, dear, any longer. That green-eyed harpy of a Langham-Greene has got hold of the whole affair. You have been seen leaving the Chatham late at night; you have been seen dismissing a sleigh on Pine Avenue and walking home."

"Yes."

"You know! But, Lynn, how can you take it so coolly? Don't you realise what a terrible thing it is?"

"In what way?"

"Why, my dear, dear girl, your reputation is gone if we can't refute these statements; you must know that."

"Yes, I know."

"You—know!"

"Yes. The fact is, Del, that I have had so many real troubles lately that the loss of that intangible thing, reputation, affects me little. I can get along without it."

"Lynn, you don't know what you are saying. A woman's reputation is like her clothing; it's a great bother, it's ruinously expensive and it's sometimes distinctly uncomfortable. The sad fact remains, however, that she must either have it or emigrate to the Sandwich Islands."

"My reputation, as you call it, Del, is gone because two or three people say that they have seen me doing an unusual thing. It is true; I did it. Yet, if I had immersed myself in a nunnery and never stirred outside unless accompanied by an army of chaperons and escorts, my reputation might be gone, just as effectu-

ally. The first man who took a dislike to me could leave me without a shred of character provided he went to a little trouble and didn't mind a few lies—what man does? What is more, I might never have heard of the matter till years after; it merely happens that I am aware of this. There may be fifty scandals about me in other circles for anything I know to the contrary. No, Del; I have several troubles, but my lost reputation is not one of them."

"My dear Lynn, are you absolutely indifferent to the opinions of others? You must be mad."

"Possibly. I don't say that I am not sorry to think that many nice women must have a wrong idea of me: but as for men—pah! What does it matter what *they* think? It is not so very long ago since a certain engagement was broken off in this very city; the 'gentleman' took his former fiancee's letters to the club and read them there aloud amid shouts of laughter. There are men for you! the men that you and I know! Who would want the good-will of a pack of hounds like that? No; let them have my reputation to tear to pieces if it amuses them; I have other things to think of."

"But Lynn, what are you going to do?"

"Stay here and face the music."

"*Stay here?*"

"Certainly. What do you take me for?"

"A madwoman. You mean to stay in a place where everyone knows—where the man is still living—where"—

"Why not? I've done nothing to be ashamed of, even granting that I have acted foolishly. I'm not going to skulk off!"

"Nothing to be ashamed of! Lynn! Why do you persist in maintaining this attitude? You compel me to speak plainly. You have done what is unforgivable—you have done"—

"Wait a minute, Del! You mean?"—

"I mean—oh, Lynn, Lynn, don't you see that if you had only kept this dreadful thing secret; if you only hadn't allowed people to know, positively, that you had done the one thing that is never pardoned in a woman—if you had only"—

"Ah!"

Lynn rose, slowly.

"I didn't know, Del—I knew what men were like—I didn't know—what you have taught me! Good-bye."

"Lynn. Wait! Where are you going?"

"Home—to tell my uncle and aunt that I have been seen leaving the Chatham at night. If they won't have me in their house—I'll go, elsewhere. I have proved the worth of the two people, man and woman, who professed to love me best on earth; now I want to rid myself of all the rest. Good-bye."

"Good heavens! You don't mean to say that you are trying to deny?"—

"I am denying and trying to deny nothing. I refuse to discuss the subject. I suppose I must make up my mind to expect insults from strangers, but I am not compelled to receive them from my friends—or from those who were once my friends. I have no friends, now; I never had father or mother or—or—and now I have neither friend nor lover. Knowing what I now know of love and friendship—I am glad!"

"Oh, Lynn, Lynn! This to me! when I would move heaven and earth to help you!" cried Mrs. Hadwell, miserably. "How can you doubt my friendship? I tell you that if, to-morrow, everyone threw you over my house would still be open to you."

"Your house! Do you think I would ever enter it again? Fool! We've known each other from childhood up, and yet, to-day, you think you can insult me and be forgiven. The sight of you makes me feel sick. Don't stop me, don't speak to me"—

Mrs. Hadwell had risen to intercept her. Lynn hastened past her to the door. There stood Gerald Amherst, white as death.

For a long moment the three stood in silence. Lynn was the first to break it and her voice was mocking.

"You interrupted an affecting farewell, Mr. Amherst. I was saying good-bye to my bosom friend, just as, not long ago, I said good-bye to my devoted lover. Having done what politeness demands I shall now take my departure."

"No!" exclaimed Estelle, rushing forward. "Don't let her, Mr. Amherst. She doesn't know what she's saying or doing and I *must* keep her till she understands. Lynn, wait! Let me explain."

Lynn, with a gesture that was almost majestic, motioned Amherst from the doorway where he still stood. He hesitated, trembling and uncertain; and while he hesitated, steps sounded in the hall behind and Mrs. Waite spoke.

"Mr. Amherst, don't go away! nor you, either, Miss Thayer. I wish very much to see you, both. I am sorry to be late, but"—

Amherst moved aside, mechanically, and Amy Waite entered, followed by Ricossia. The two women stood where they were, unable to speak or move; and Ricossia spoke, pleasantly.

"Mrs. Waite has brought me here in order that I may explain"—

"*Liol!*"—

"Don't be absurd, Lynn! The fact is, good people," said the boy carelessly, "that Lynn's mother was also mine; and Lynn, as a child, contracted some crazy affection for me which seems to have got her into general trouble. In the first place, she swore an insane oath to my mother—you see the latter was dying and sent for her secretly—it's hard to explain! but Mr. and Mrs. Thayer, knowing

what a bad lot my father was and judging rightly that I would be likely to take after him—which I certainly did!—made it part of the bargain when they adopted Lynn that she was to have nothing to do with the lot of us. Lynn, however, had always remembered me, it seems, and so, when my mother sent for her and explained that my father would see me starve to death before he would spend a penny on me, Lynn undertook to provide for my upbringing out of her earnings as a teacher. That was all very well; but what does my mother do but get excited and make her swear that she will never tell anyone that I am her brother, in case it may get to the ears of the Thayers and make them throw her over. Lynn tries to get out of it but finally swears and—and then—I'm not over strong, and I fancy I'll sit down if you'll allow me. For God's sake, Lynn, don't look like that! what on earth's the matter with you?"

No one spoke and Ricossia leaned back wearily in the chair which he had taken, his beautiful face haggard, his great eyes hollow and emptied of expression. Lynn stood like a statue; since her first exclamation she had remained silent but her face had changed. Something resembling hope had crept into her eyes and mingled with the fierce love that illumined them whenever they rested on her brother. As he lay back, breathing faintly, she moved toward him and stood, looking down.

"God is not all cruel," she said, as though to herself. "He has taken all the rest—but He has given me this, at least, before you die—the knowledge that you do care a little, Liol. Else, why should you have done this?"

Her tired face softened with a beautiful peace.

"I don't know what on earth you are muttering to yourself about," said the consumptive, shrugging his shoulders, whimsically, "but, if you imagine, my dear girl, that I dragged myself up this infernal hill to save you from the consequences of your own folly, you're mistaken. Why shouldn't you break the fool oath? However, you'll be glad to hear that you'll be able to keep your own earnings in the future. I've made a haul that"——

"Mr. Ricossia," broke in the metallic voice of Mrs. Waite, "refused at first to explain the object of Miss Thayer's visits. I therefore"—

"She therefore paid me well to do it—as I surmised she would," said Ricossia, composedly. "What *are* you looking like that for, Lynn? Thank goodness, I'm dependent on your vagaries no longer; the doctor tells me that, if I reach California alive, I may live a month or so longer—he doesn't promise that I *will* reach it,—but if I do!"— He sprang to his feet, irradiated and glorious—"*if I do*—by God, I'll see Life before I die!"

"You infernal young scoundrel!" broke in Amherst, unable to contain himself longer, "you d——d ungrateful young blackguard! is this your return to your sister for all she has done and suffered? Have you no shame?"

"Not a particle!" answered the other, laughing. "No shame and no love in my composition! I never cared for any living thing but myself—not even my mother. As for Lynn, I'm going to do her one kindness before I die; and that is to tell her the truth. Lynn, you have never been anything to me at any time but a necessary evil; I had to have money to live, and from you, only, was I able to obtain it; therefore I tried to feign a little affection for you which I never felt in the most remote degree. I've allowed you to sacrifice time, money, and finally reputation to me; and now that I'm going off alone to die—riotously and wickedly and happily as I've always wanted to—I leave you this piece of advice. Marry Amherst and forget all about me. I'll forget you as soon as I'm out of your sight, which will be very soon, I promise you."

Something approaching horror showed in the faces of his hearers; they looked uncertainly at one another, doubtful whether to still the cruel voice or no. Lynn, only, remained motionless; her face was grey and her hands twitched a little. Gerald, who stood nearest, alone heard her whisper:

"Not this! Oh, God, not this!"

"Lynn," he burst forth, "what can I say? Come with me, forgive me; I'll spend my life in making amends. Don't mind him; he doesn't know what he's saying; he's sick, crazy, mad! they all get like that when they take drugs. Lynn!"

She turned very slowly and looked at him.

"You—want me?" she asked, dully. "Think!—the best of me is dead; you've helped to kill it, all of you. I'm an old woman now; I'll never be young, again, never be young or light-hearted or gay again, while this life lasts. Are you sure you want me?"

"Come!"

Lynn looked at him ... then slowly, very slowly, put her hand in his.

"The little boy I loved is dead, too," she said, rather lifelessly. "That—that is a ghoul that has taken his beautiful form. Oh, my baby, my baby! my little dark-eyed angel that I loved so! to think that you should die and I not know it. Or perhaps you never lived, really.... Let us go, Gerald! let us go away from it, all! I'm tired. You—you'll not fail me?"

"Before God, I will not."

They moved toward the door. On its threshold Lynn paused and turned. The red evening sunlight was streaming through the window and its scarlet flame lay strangely on the deathless beauty of her brother's face. She surveyed it in silence ... the face that had held all heaven and all hell for her since the moment when she, a lonely, loveless child, had seen and worshipped it first.

"Good-bye, Liol!" she said at last, very softly. "You've been my idol all my life, and I'm never going to see you again in time or in eternity, and I thank God for it.... Good-bye."

Gerald drew her gently away and the door closed behind them.

THE END.

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