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THE
FASHIONABLE ADVENTURES OF
JOSHUA CRAIG

A NOVEL

BY DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

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THE FASHIONABLE ADVENTURES OF JOSHUA CRAIG

CHAPTER I

MR. CRAIG ARRAYS HIMSELF

It was one of the top-floor-rear flats in the Wyandotte, not merely biggest of Washington's apartment hotels, but also "most exclusive"—which is the elegant way of saying most expensive. The Wyandotte had gone up before landlords grasped the obvious truth that in a fire-proof structure locations farthest from noise and dust should and could command highest prices; so Joshua Craig's flat was the cheapest in the house. The ninety dollars a month loomed large in his eyes, focused to little-town ideas of values; it was, in fact, small for shelter in "the DE LUXE district of the DE LUXE quarter," to quote Mrs. Senator Mulvey, that simple, far-Western soul, who, finding snobbishness to be the chief distinguishing mark of the Eastern upper classes, assumed it was a virtue, acquired it laboriously, and practiced it as openly and proudly as a preacher does piety. Craig's chief splendor was a sitting-room, called a parlor and bedecked in the red plush and Nottingham that represent hotel men's probably shrewd guess at the traveling public's notion of interior opulence. Next the sitting-room, and with the same dreary outlook, or, rather, downlook, upon disheveled and squalid back yards, was a dingy box of a bedroom. Like the parlor, it was outfitted with furniture that had degenerated upward, floor by floor, from the spacious and luxurious first-floor suites. Between the two rooms, in dark mustiness, lay a bathroom with suspicious-looking, wood-inclosed plumbing; the rusted iron of the tub peered through scuffs and seams in the age-grayed porcelain.

Arkwright glanced from the parlor where he was sitting into the gloom of the open bathroom and back again. His cynical brown-green eyes paused upon a scatter of clothing, half-hiding the badly-rubbed red plush of the sofa—a mussy flannel nightshirt with mothholes here and there; kneed trousers, uncannily reminiscent of a rough and strenuous wearer; a smoking-jacket that, after a youth of cheap gayety, was now a frayed and tattered wreck, like an old tramp, whose "better days" were none too good. On the radiator stood a pair of wrinkled shoes that had never known trees; their soles were curved like rockers. An old pipe clamored at his nostrils, though it was on the table near the window, the full length of the room from him. Papers and books were strewn about everywhere. It was difficult to believe these unkempt and uncouth surroundings, and the personality that had created them, were actually being harbored behind the walls of the Wyandotte.

"What a hole!" grumbled Arkwright. He was in evening clothes, so correct in their care and in their carelessness that even a woman would have noted and admired. "What a mess! What a hole!"

"How's that?" came from the bedroom in an aggressive voice, so penetrating that it seemed loud, though it was not, and much roughened by open-air speaking. "What are you growling about?"

Arkwright raised his tone: "Filthy hole!" said he. "Filthy mess!"

Now appeared in the bedroom door a tall young man of unusual strength and nearly perfect proportions. The fine head was carried commandingly; with its crop of dark, matted hair it suggested the rude, fierce figure-head of a Viking galley; the huge, aggressively-masculine features proclaimed ambition, energy, intelligence. To see Josh Craig was to have instant sense of the presence of a personality. The contrast between him standing half-dressed in the doorway and the man seated in fashionable and cynically-critical superciliousness was more than a matter of exteriors. Arkwright, with features carved, not hewn as were Craig's, handsome in civilization's over-trained, overbred extreme, had an intelligent, superior look also. But it was the look of expertness in things hardly worth the trouble of learning; it was aristocracy's highly-prized air of the dog that leads in the bench show and tails in the field. He was like a firearm polished and incrusted with gems and hanging in a connoisseur's wall-case; Josh was like a battle-tested rifle in the sinewy hands of an Indian in full war-paint. Arkwright showed that he had physical strength, too; but it was of the kind got at the gymnasium and at gentlemanly sport—the kind that wins only where the rules are carefully refined and amateurized. Craig's figure had the solidity, the tough fiber of things grown in the open air,

in the cold, wet hardship of the wilderness.

Arkwright's first glance of admiration for this figure of the forest and the teepee changed to a mingling of amusement and irritation. The barbarian was not clad in the skins of wild beasts, which would have set him off superbly, but was trying to get himself arrayed for a fashionable ball. He had on evening trousers, pumps, black cotton socks with just enough silk woven in to give them the shabby, shamed air of having been caught in a snobbish pretense at being silk. He was buttoning a shirt torn straight down the left side of the bosom from collar-band to end of tail; and the bosom had the stiff, glassy glaze that advertises the cheap laundry.

"Didn't you write me I must get an apartment in this house?" demanded he.

"Not in the attic," rejoined Arkwright.

"I can't afford anything better."

"You can't afford anything so bad."

"Bad!"

Craig looked round as pleased as a Hottentot with a string of colored glass beads. "Why, I've got a private sitting-room AND a private bath! I never was so well-off before in my life. I tell you, Grant, I'm not surprised any more that you Easterners get effete and worthless. I begin to like this lolling in luxury, and I keep the bell-boys on the jump. Won't you have something to drink?"

Arkwright pointed his slim cane at the rent in the shirt. "What are you going to do with that?" said he.

"This? Oh!"—Josh thrust his thick backwoods-man's hand in the tear—"Very simple. A safety-pin or so from the lining of the vest—excuse me, waistcoat—into the edge of the bosom."

"Splendid!" ejaculated Arkwright. "Superb!"

Craig, with no scent for sarcasm so delicate, pushed on with enthusiasm: "The safety-pin's the mainstay of bachelor life," said he rhetorically. "It's his badge of freedom. Why, I can even repair socks with it!"

"Throw that shirt away," said Arkwright, with a contemptuous switch of his cane. "Put on another. You're not dressing for a shindy in a shack."

"But it's the only one of my half-dozen that has a bang-up bosom."

"Bang-up? That sheet of mottled mica?"

Craig surveyed the shiny surface ruefully. "What's the matter with this?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing," replied Arkwright, in disgust. "Only, it looks more like something to roof a house with than like linen for a civilized man."

Craig reared. "But, damn it, Grant, I'm not civilized. I'm a wild man, and I'm going to stay wild. I belong to the common people, and it's my game—and my preference, too—to stick to them. I'm willing to make concessions; I'm not a fool. I know there was a certain amount of truth in those letters you took the trouble to write me from Europe. I know that to play the game here in Washington I've got to do something in society. But"—here Josh's eyes flashed, and he bent on his friend a look that was impressive—"I'm still going to be myself. I'll make 'em accept me as I am. Dealing with men as individuals, I make them do what _I_ want, make 'em like me as I am."

"Every game has its own rules," said Arkwright. "You'll get on better—quicker—go further—here if you'll learn a few elementary things. I don't see that wearing a whole shirt decently done up is going to compromise any principles. Surely you can do that and still be as common as you like. The people look up to the fellow that's just a little better dressed than they."

Josh eyed Arkwright in the way that always made him wonder whether he was in full possession of the secret of this strenuous young Westerner. "But," said he, "they love and trust the man who will have nothing which all may not have. The shirt will do for this evening." And he turned back into the bedroom.

Arkwright reflected somewhat uncomfortably. He felt that he himself was right; yet he could not deny that "Josh's cheap demagoguery" sounded fine and true. He soon forgot the argument in the study of his surroundings. "You're living like a wild beast here, Josh," he presently called out. "You must get a valet."

A loud laugh was the reply.

"Or a wife," continued Arkwright. Then, in the voice of one announcing an inspiration, "Yes—that's it! A wife!"

Craig reappeared. He had on his waistcoat and coat now, and his hair was brushed. Arkwright could not but admit that the personality took the edge off the clothes; even the "mottled mica"—the rent was completely hid—seemed to have lost the worst of its glaze and stiffness. "You'll do, Josh," said he. "I spoke too quickly. If I hadn't accidentally been thrust into the innermost secrets of your toilet I'd never have suspected." He looked the Westerner over with gentle, friendly patronage. "Yes, you'll do. You look fairly well at a glance—and a man's clothes rarely get more than that."

Craig released his laugh upon his fastidious friend's judicial seriousness. "The trouble with you, Grant, is you've never lived a human life. You've always been sheltered and pampered, lifted in and out of bed by valets, had a suit of clothes for every hour in the day. I don't see how it is I happen to like you." And in Craig's face and voice there was frankly the condescension of superior to undoubted inferior.

Arkwright seemed to be wavering between resentment and amused disdain. Then he remembered the circumstances of their first acquaintance—those frightful days in the Arizona desert, without food, with almost no

water, and how this man had been absolute ruler of the party of lost and dying men; how he had forced them to march on and on, with entreaties, with curses, with blows finally; how he had brought them to safety—all as a matter of course, without any vanity or boasting—had been leader by divine right of strength of body and soul. Grant turned his eyes from Craig, for there were tears in them. "I don't see why you like me, either, Josh," said he. "But you do—and—damn it all, I'd die for you."

"I guess you'll come pretty near dying of shame before this evening's over," laughed Craig. "This is the first time in my life I ever was in a fashionable company."

"There's nothing to be frightened about," Grant assured him.

"Frightened!" Josh laughed boisterously—Arkwright could have wished he would temper that laugh. "I—frightened by a bunch of popinjays? You see, it's not really in the least important whether they like me or not—at least, not to me. I'll get there, anyhow. And when I do, I'll deal with them according to their deserts. So they'd better hustle to get solid with me."

In the two years since he had seen Craig, Arkwright had almost forgotten his habit of bragging and blowing about himself—what he had done, what he was going to do. The newspapers, the clippings Josh sent him, had kept him informed of the young Minnesotan's steady, rapid rise in politics; and whenever he recalled the absurd boasting that had made him feel Craig would never come to anything, he assumed it was a weakness of youth and inexperience which had, no doubt, been conquered. But, no; here was the same old, conceited Josh, as crudely and vulgarly self-confident as when he was twenty-five and just starting at the law in a country town. Yet Arkwright could not but admit there had been more than a grain of truth in Craig's former self-laudations, that there was in victories won a certain excuse for his confidence about the future. This young man, not much beyond thirty, with a personality so positive and so rough that he made enemies right and left, rousing the envy of men to fear that here was an ambition which must be downed or it would become a tyranny over them—this young man, by skill at politics and by sympathetic power with people in the mass, had already compelled a President who didn't like him to appoint him to the chief post under an Attorney-General who detested him.

"How are you getting on with the Attorney-General?" asked Arkwright, as they set out in his electric brougham.

"He's getting on with me much better," replied Craig, "now that he has learned not to trifle with me."

"Stillwater is said to be a pretty big man," said Arkwright warningly.

"The bigger the man, the easier to frighten," replied Josh carelessly, "because the more he's got to lose. But it's a waste of time to talk politics to you. Grant, old man, I'm sick and worn out, and how lonesome! I'm successful. But what of that, since I'm miserable? If it wasn't for my sense of duty, by Heaven, I sometimes think I'd drop it all and go back to Wayne."

"Don't do that, Josh!" exclaimed Arkwright. "Don't let the country go rolling off to ruin!"

"Like all small creatures," said Craig, "you take serious matters lightly, and light matters seriously. You were right a moment ago when you said I needed a wife."

"That's all settled," said Grant. "I'm going to get you one."

"A woman doesn't need a man—if she isn't too lazy to earn a living," pursued Craig. "But what's a man without a woman about?"

"You want a wife, and you want her quick," said Arkwright.

"You saw what a condition my clothes are in. Then, I need somebody to talk with."

"To talk to," corrected Grant.

"I can't have you round all the time to talk to."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Arkwright. "You never talk about anything but yourself."

"Some day, my boy," said Josh, with his grave good humor of the great man tolerating the antics of a mountebank, "you'll appreciate it wasn't the subject that was dull, but the ears. For the day'll come when everybody'll be thinking and talking about me most of the time."

Arkwright grinned. "It's lucky you don't let go before everybody like that."

"Yes, but I do," rejoined Craig. "And why not? They can't stop my going ahead. Besides, it's not a bad idea"—he nodded, with that shrewdness which was the great, deep-lying vein in his nature—"not at all a bad idea, to have people think you a frank, loose-mouthed, damn fool—IF you ain't. Ambition's a war. And it's a tremendous advantage to lead your enemies to underestimate you. That's one reason why I ALWAYS win ... So you're going TO TRY to get me a wife?"

"I'm going to get you one—one of the sort you need. You need a woman who'll tame you down and lick you into shape."

Craig smiled scornfully.

"One who'll know how to smooth the enemies you make with your rough-and-tumble manners; one who'll win friends for you socially—"

Josh made a vehement gesture of dissent. "Not on your life!" cried he. "Of course, my wife must be a lady, and interested in my career. But none of your meddling politicians in petticoats for me! I'll do my own political maneuvering. I want a woman, not a bad imitation of a man."

"Well, let that go," said Arkwright. "Also, she ought to be able to supply you with funds for your political machinery."

Josh sat up as if this were what he had been listening for.

"That's right!" cried he. "Politics is hell for a poor man, nowadays. The people are such thoughtless, short-sighted fools—" He checked himself, and in a different tone went on: "However, I don't mean exactly that—"

"You needn't hedge, Josh, with me."

"I don't want you to be thinking I'm looking for a rich woman."

"Not at all—not at all," laughed his friend.

"If she had too much money it'd be worse for my career than if she had none at all."

"I understand," said Arkwright.

"Enough money to make me independent—if I should get in a tight place," continued Josh. "Yes, I must marry. The people are suspicious of a bachelor. The married men resent his freedom—even the happily married ones. And all the women, married and single, resent his not surrendering."

"I never suspected you of cynicism."

"Yes," continued Craig, in an instantly and radically changed tone, "the people like a married man, a man with children. It looks respectable, settled. It makes 'em feel he's got a stake in the country—a home and property to defend. Yes, I want a wife."

"I don't see why you've neglected it so long."

"Too busy."

"And too—ambitious," suggested Arkwright.

"What do you mean?" demanded Josh, bristling.

"You thought you'd wait to marry until you were nearer your final place in the world. Being cut out for a king, you know—why, you thought you'd like a queen—one of those fine, delicate ladies you'd read about."

Craig's laugh might have been confession, it might have been mere amusement. "I want a wife that suits me," said he. "And I'll get her."

It was Arkwright's turn to be amused. "There's one game you don't in the least understand," said he.

"What game is that?"

"The woman game."

Craig shrugged contemptuously. "Marbles! Jacks!" Then he added: "Now that I'm about ready to marry, I'll look the offerings over." He clapped his friend on the shoulder. "And you can bet your last cent I'll take what I want."

"Don't be too sure," jeered Arkwright.

The brougham was passing a street lamp that for an instant illuminated Craig's face. Again Arkwright saw the expression that made him feel extremely uncertain of the accuracy of his estimates of the "wild man's" character.

"Yes, I'll get her," said Josh, "and for a reason that never occurs to you shallow people. I get what I want because what I want wants me—for the same reason that the magnet gets the steel."

Arkwright looked admiringly at his friend's strong, aggressive face.

"You're a queer one, Josh," said he. "Nothing ordinary about you."

"I should hope not!" exclaimed Craig. "Now for the plunge."

CHAPTER II

IN THE BEST SOCIETY

Grant's electric had swung in at the end of the long line of carriages of all kinds, from coach of ambassador and costly limousine of multi-millionaire to humble herdic wherein poor, official grandee's wife and daughter were feeling almost as common as if they had come in a street car or afoot. Josh Craig, leaning from the open window, could see the grand entrance under the wide and lofty porte-cochère—the women, swathed in silk and fur, descending from the carriages and entering the wide-flung doors of the vestibule; liveries, flowers, lights, sounds of stringed instruments, intoxicating glimpses of magnificence at windows, high and low. And now the electric was at the door. He and Arkwright sprang out, hastened up the broad steps. His expression amused Arkwright; it was intensely self-conscious, resolutely indifferent—the kind of look that betrays tempestuous inward perturbations and

misgivings. "Josh is a good deal of a snob, for all his brave talk," thought he. "But," he went on to reflect, "that's only human. We're all impressed by externals, no matter what we may pretend to ourselves and to others. I've been used to this sort of thing all my life and I know how little there is in it, yet I'm in much the same state of bedazzlement as Josh."

Josh had a way of answering people's thoughts direct which Arkwright sometimes suspected was not altogether accidental. He now said: "But there's a difference between your point of view and mine. You take this seriously through and through. I laugh at it in the bottom of my heart, and size it up at its true value. I'm like a child that don't really believe in goblins, yet likes the shivery effects of goblin stories."

"I don't believe in goblins, either," said Arkwright.

"You don't believe in anything else," said Josh.

Arkwright steered him through the throng, and up to the hostess—Mrs. Burke, stout, honest, with sympathy in her eyes and humor in the lines round her sweet mouth. "Well, Josh," she said in a slow, pleasant monotone, "you HAVE done a lot of growing since I saw you. I always knew you'd come to some bad end. And here you are—in politics and in society. Gus!"

A tall, haughty-looking young woman, standing next her, turned and fixed upon Craig a pair of deep, deep eyes that somehow flustered him. Mrs. Burke presented him, and he discovered that it was her daughter-in-law. While she was talking with Arkwright, he examined her toilette. He thought it startling—audacious in its display of shoulders and back—until he got over his dazed, dazzled feeling, and noted the other women about. Wild horses could not have dragged it from him, but he felt that this physical display was extremely immodest; and at the same time that he eagerly looked his face burned. "If I do pick one of these," said he to himself, "I'm jiggered if I let her appear in public dressed this way. Why, out home women have been white-capped for less."

Arkwright had drifted away from him; he let the crowd gently push him toward the wall, into the shelter of a clump of palms and ferns. There, with his hands in his pockets, and upon his face what he thought an excellent imitation of Arkwright's easy, bored expression of thinly-veiled cynicism, he surveyed the scene and tried to judge it from the standpoint of the "common people." His verdict was that it was vain, frivolous, unworthy, beneath the serious consideration of a man of affairs such as he. But he felt that he was not quite frank, in fact was dishonest, with himself in this lofty disdain. It represented what he ought to feel, not what he actually was feeling. "At least," said he to himself, "I'll never confess to any one that I'm weak enough to be impressed by this sort of thing. Anyhow, to confess a weakness is to encourage it ... No wonder society is able to suck in and destroy so many fellows of my sort! If _I_ am tempted what must it mean to the ordinary man?" He noted with angry shame that he felt a swelling of pride because he, of so lowly an origin, born no better than the machine-like lackeys, had been able to push himself in upon—yes, up among—these people on terms of equality. And it was, for the moment, in vain that he reminded himself that most of them were of full as lowly origin as he; that few indeed could claim to be more than one generation removed from jack-boots and jeans; that the most elegant had more relations among the "vulgar herd" than they had among the "high folks."

"What are you looking so glum and sour about?" asked Arkwright.

He startled guiltily. So, his mean and vulgar thoughts had been reflected in his face. "I was thinking of the case I have to try before the Supreme Court next week," said he.

"Well, I'll introduce you to one of the Justices—old Towler. He comes of the 'common people,' like you. But he dearly loves fashionable society—makes himself ridiculous going to balls and trying to flirt. It'll do you no end of good to meet these people socially. You'll be surprised to see how respectful and eager they'll all be if you become a recognized social favorite. For real snobbishness give me your friends, the common people, when they get up where they can afford to put on airs. Why, even the President has a sneaking hankering after fashionable people. I tell you, in Washington EVERYTHING goes by social favor, just as it does in London—and would in Paris if fashionable society would deign to notice the Republic."

"Introduce me to old Towler," said Craig, curt and bitter. He was beginning to feel that Arkwright was at least in part right; and it angered him for the sake of the people from whom he had sprung, and to whom he had pledged his public career. "Then," he went on, "I'm going home. And you'll see me among these butterflies and hoptoads no more."

"Can't trust yourself, eh?" suggested Arkwright.

Craig flashed exaggerated scorn that was confession.

"I'll do better than introduce you to Towler," proceeded Arkwright. "I'll present you to his daughter—a dyed and padded old horror, but very influential with her father and all the older crowd. Sit up to her, Josh. You can lay the flattery on as thick as her paint and as high as her topknot of false hair. If she takes to you your fortune's made."

"I tell you, my fortune is not dependent on—" began Craig vehemently.

"Cut it out, old man," interrupted Arkwright. "No stump speeches here. They don't go. They bore people and create an impression that you're both ridiculous and hypocritical."

Arkwright left Josh with Towler's daughter, Mrs. Raymond, who was by no means the horror Arkwright's language of fashionable exaggeration had pictured, and who endured Craig's sophomoric eulogies of "your great and revered father," because the eulogist was young and handsome, and obviously anxious to please her. As Arkwright passed along the edge of the dancers a fan reached out and touched him on the arm. He halted, faced the double line of women, mostly elderly, seated on the palm-roofed dais extending the length of that end of the ballroom.

"Hel-LO!" called he. "Just the person I was looking for. How is Margaret this evening?"

"As you see," replied the girl, unfurling the long fan of eagle plumes with which she had tapped him. "Sit down.... Jackie"—this to a rosy, eager-faced youth beside her—"run away and amuse yourself. I want to talk seriously to this elderly person."

"I'm only seven years older than you," said Arkwright, as he seated himself where Jackie had been vainly endeavoring to induce Miss Severence to take him seriously.

"And I am twenty-eight, and have to admit to twenty-four," said Margaret.

"Don't frown that way. It makes wrinkles; and what's more unsightly than a wrinkled brow in a woman?"

"I don't in the least care," replied the girl. "I've made up my mind to stop fooling and marry."

"Jackie?"

"If I can't do better." She laughed a low, sweet laugh, like her voice; and her voice suggested a leisurely brook flitting among mossy stones. "You see, I've lost that first bloom of youth the wife-pickers prize so highly. I'm not unsophisticated enough to please them. And I haven't money enough to make them overlook such defects as maturity and intelligence—in fact, I've no money at all."

"You were never so good-looking in your life," said Grant. "I recall you were rather homely as a child and merely nice and fresh-looking when you came out. You're one of those that improve with time."

"Thanks," said the girl dryly. She was in no mood for the barren blossom of non-marrying men's compliments.

"The trouble with you is the same as with me," pursued he. "We've both spent our time with the young married set, where marriage is regarded as a rather stupid joke. You ought to have stuck to the market-place until your business was settled."

She nodded a thoughtful assent. "Yes, that was my sad mistake," said she. "However, I'm going to do my best to repair it."

He reflected. "You must marry money," he declared, as if it were a verdict.

"Either some one who's got it or some one who can get it."

"Some one who's got it, I'd advise."

"Bad advice," commented the girl, her hazel eyes gazing dreamily, languorously into the distance. She looked a woman on romance bent, a woman without a mercenary thought in her head. "Very bad advice," she went on. "Men who've got money may lose it and be unable to make any more. What a helpless thing YOU'D be but for what you have inherited and will inherit. Yet you're above the average of our sort."

"Humph!" said Arkwright, with an irritated laugh. Humor at his expense was a severe strain upon him. It always is to those whose sense of humor is keen; for they best appreciate the sting that lies in the pleasantest jest.

"It would be wiser—if one dared be wise," pursued the girl, "to marry a man who could get money. That kind of man is safest. Only death or insanity can make him a disappointment."

Arkwright eyed her curiously. "What a good head you've got on you, Rita," said he. "Like your grandmother."

The girl shivered slightly. "Don't SPEAK of her!" she exclaimed with an uneasy glance around. And Grant knew he was correct in his suspicion as to who was goading and lashing her to hasten into matrimony.

"Well—have you selected your—"

As Arkwright hesitated she supplied, "Victim." They laughed, she less enthusiastically than he. "Though," she added, "I assure you, I'll make him happy. It takes intelligence to make a man happy, even if he wants the most unintelligent kind of happiness. And you've just admitted I'm not stupid."

Arkwright was studying her. He had a sly instinct that there was a reason deeper than their old and intimate friendship for her reposing this extreme of confidence in him. No doubt she was not without a vague hope that possibly this talk might set him to thinking of her as a wife for himself. Well, why not? He ought to marry, and he could afford it. Where would he find a more ladylike person—or where one who was at the same time so attractive? He studied, with a certain personal interest, her delicate face, her figure, slim and gracefully curved, as her evening dress fully revealed it. Yes, a charming, most ladylike figure. And the skin of her face, of neck and shoulders, was beautifully white, and of the texture suggesting that it will rub if too impetuously caressed. Yes, a man would hesitate to kiss her unless he were well shaved. At the very thought of kissing her Grant felt a thrill and a glow she had never before roused in him. She had an abundance of blue-black hair, and it and her slender black brows and long lashes gave her hazel eyes a peculiar charm of mingled passion and languor. She had a thin nose, well shaped, its nostrils very sensitive; slightly, charmingly-puckered lips; a small, strong chin. Certainly she had improved greatly in the two years since he had seen her in evening dress. "Though, perhaps," reflected he, "I only think so because I used to see her too much, really to appreciate her."

"Well, why didn't you?" she was saying, idly waving her fan and gazing vaguely around the room.

"Why didn't I—what?"

"You were trying to decide why you never fell in love with me."

"So I was," admitted Arkwright.

"Now if I had had lots of cash," mocked she.

He reddened, winced. She had hit the exact reason. Having a great deal of money, he wanted more—enough to

make the grandest kind of splurge in a puddle where splurge was everything. "Rather, because you are too intelligent," drawled he. "I want somebody who'd fit into my melting moods, not a woman who'd make me ashamed by seeming to sit in judgment on my folly."

"A man mustn't have too much respect for a woman if he's to fall utterly in love with her—must he?"

Arkwright smiled constrainedly. He liked cynical candor in men, but only pretended to like it in women because bald frankness in women was now the fashion. "See," said he, "how ridiculous I'd feel trying to say sentimental things to you. Besides, it's not easy to fall in love with a girl one has known since she was born, and with whom he's always been on terms of brotherly, quite unsentimental intimacy."

Rita gave him a look that put this suggestion out of countenance by setting him to thrilling again. He felt that her look was artful, was deliberate, but he could not help responding to it. He began to be a little afraid of her, a little nervous about her; but he managed to say indifferently, "And why haven't YOU fallen in love with ME?"

She smiled. "It isn't proper for a well-brought-up girl to love until she is loved, is it?" Her expression gave Grant a faint suggestion of a chill of apprehension lest she should be about to take advantage of their friendship by making a dead set for him. But she speedily tranquilized him by saying: "No, my reason was that I didn't want to spoil my one friendship. Even a business person craves the luxury of a friend—and marrying has been my business," this with a slight curl of her pretty, somewhat cruel mouth. "To be quite frank, I gave you up as a possibility years ago. I saw I wasn't your style. Your tastes in women are rather—coarse."

Arkwright flushed. "I do like 'em a bit noisy and silly," he admitted. "That sort is so—so GEMUTHLICH, as the Germans say."

"Who's the man you delivered over to old Patsy Raymond? I see he's still fast to her."

"Handsome, isn't he?"

"Of a sort."

"It's Craig—the Honorable Joshua Craig—Assistant TO the Attorney-General. He's from Minnesota. He's the real thing. But you'd not like him."

"He looks quite—tame, compared to what he was two years or so ago," said Rita, her voice as indolent as her slowly-moving eagle feathers.

"Oh, you've met him?"

"No—only saw him. When I went West with the Burkes, Gus and the husband took me to a political meeting—one of those silly, stuffy gatherings where some blatant politician bellows out a lot of lies, and a crowd of badly-dressed people listen and swallow and yelp. Your friend was one of the speakers. What he said sounded—" Rita paused for a word.

"Sounded true," suggested Grant.

"Not at all. Nobody really cares anything about the people, not even themselves. No, it sounded as if he had at least half-convinced himself, while the others showed they were lying outright. We rather liked him—at the safe distance of half the hall. He's the kind of man that suggests—menageries—lions—danger if the bars break."

"How women do like that in a man!"

"Do you know him?"

"Through and through. He's a fraud, of course, like all politicians. But beneath the fraud there's a man—I think—a great, big man, strong and sure of himself—which is what can't be said of many of us who wear trousers and pose as lords of creation."

The girl seemed to have ceased to listen, was apparently watching the dancers, Arkwright continued to gaze at his friend, to admire the impressive, if obviously posed, effect of his handsome head and shoulders. He smiled with a tender expression, as one smiles at the weakness of those one loves. Suddenly he said: "By Jove, Rita—just the thing!"

"What?" asked the girl, resuming the languid waving of her eagle fan.

"Marry him—marry Josh Craig. He'll not make much money out of politics. I doubt if even a woman could corrupt him that far. But you could take him out of politics and put him in the law. He could roll it up there. The good lawyers sell themselves dear nowadays, and he'd make a killing."

"This sounds interesting."

"It's a wonder I hadn't thought of it before."

The girl gave a curious, quiet smile. "I had," said she.

"YOU had!" exclaimed Arkwright.

"A woman always keeps a careful list of eligibles," explained she. "As Lucy Burke told me he was headed for Washington, I put him on my list that very night—well down toward the bottom, but, still, on it. I had quite forgotten him until to-night."

Arkwright was staring at her. Her perfect frankness, absolute naturalness with him, unreserved trust of him, gave him a guilty feeling for the bitter judgment on her character which he had secretly formed as the result of her confidences. "Yet, really," thought he, "she's quite the nicest girl I know, and the cleverest. If she had hid herself

from me, as the rest do, I'd never for one instant have suspected her of having so much—so much—calm, good sense—for that's all it amounts to." He decided it was a mistake for any human being in any circumstances to be absolutely natural and unconcealingly candid. "We're such shallow fakers," reflected he, "that if any one confesses to us things not a tenth part as bad as what we privately think and do, why, we set him—or her—especially her—down as a living, breathing atrocity in pants or petticoats."

Margaret was of the women who seem never to think of what they are really absorbed in, and never to look at what they are really scrutinizing. She disconcerted him by interrupting his reflections with: "Your private opinion of me is of small consequence to me, Grant, beside the relief and the joy of being able to say my secret self aloud. Also"—here she grew dizzy at her own audacity in the frankness that fools—"Also, if I wished to get you, Grant, or any man, I'd not be silly enough to fancy my character or lack of it would affect him. That isn't what wins men—is it?"

"You and Josh Craig have a most uncomfortable way of answering people's thoughts," said Arkwright. "Now, how did you guess I was thinking mean things about you?"

"For the same reason that Mr. Craig is able to guess what's going on in your head."

"And that reason is—"

She laughed mockingly. "Because I know you, Grant Arkwright—you, the meanest-generous man, and the most generous-mean man the Lord ever permitted. The way to make you generous is to give you a mean impulse; the way to make you mean is to set you to fearing you're in danger of being generous."

"There's a bouquet with an asp coiled in it," said Arkwright, pleased; for with truly human vanity he had accepted the compliment and had thrown away the criticism. "I'll go bring Josh Craig."

"No, not to-night," said Miss Severence, with a sudden compression of the lips and a stern, almost stormy contraction of the brows.

"Please don't do that, Rita," cried Arkwright. "It reminds me of your grandmother."

The girl's face cleared instantly, and all overt signs of strength of character vanished in her usual expression of sweet, reserved femininity. "Bring him to-morrow," said she. "A little late, please. I want others to be there, so that I can study him unobserved." She laughed. "This is a serious matter for me. My time is short, and my list of possible eligibles less extended than I could wish." And with a satiric smile and a long, languorous, coquettish glance, she waved him away and waved the waiting Jackie into his place.

Arkwright found Craig clear of "Patsy" Raymond and against the wall near the door. He was obviously unconscious of himself, of the possibility that he might be observed. His eyes were pouncing from blaze of jewels to white neck, to laughing, sensuous face, to jewels again or to lithe, young form, scantily clad and swaying in masculine arm in rhythm with the waltz. It gave Arkwright a qualm of something very like terror to note the contrast between his passive figure and his roving eyes with their wolfish gleam—like Blucher, when he looked out over London and said: "God! What a city to sack!"

Arkwright thought Josh was too absorbed to be aware of his approach; but as soon as he was beside him Josh said: "You were right about that apartment of mine. It's a squalid hole. Six months ago, when I got my seventy-five hundred a year, I thought I was rich. Rich? Why, that woman there has ten years' salary on her hair. All the money I and my whole family ever saw wouldn't pay for the rings on any one of a hundred hands here. It makes me mad and it makes me greedy."

"'I warned you," said Arkwright.

Craig wheeled on him. "You don't—can't—understand. You're like all these people. Money is your god. But I don't want money, I want power—to make all these snobs with their wealth, these millionaires, these women with fine skins and beautiful bodies, bow down before me—that's what I want!"

Arkwright laughed. "Well, it's up to you, Joshua."

Craig tossed his Viking head. "Yes, it's up to me, and I'll get what I want—the people and I.... Who's THAT frightful person?"

Into the room, only a few feet from them, advanced an old woman—very old, but straight as a projectile. She carried her head high, and her masses of gray-white hair, coiled like a crown, gave her the seeming of royalty in full panoply. There was white lace over her black velvet at the shoulders; her train swept yards behind her. She was bearing a cane, or rather a staff, of ebony; but it suggested, not decrepitude, but power—perhaps even a weapon that might be used to enforce authority should occasion demand. In her face, in her eyes, however, there was that which forbade the supposition of any revolt being never so remotely possible.

As she advanced across the ballroom, dancing ceased before her and around her, and but for the noise of the orchestra there would have been an awed and painful silence. Mrs. Burke's haughty daughter-in-law, with an expression of eager desire to conciliate and to please, hastened forward and conducted the old lady to a gilt armchair in the center of the dais, across the end of the ballroom. It was several minutes before the gayety was resumed, and then it seemed to have lost the abandon which the freely-flowing champagne had put into it.

"WHO is that frightful person?" repeated Craig. He was scowling like a king angered and insulted by the advent of an eclipsing rival.

"Grandma,"' replied Arkwright, his flippancy carefully keyed low.

"I've never seen a more dreadful person!" exclaimed Craig angrily. "And a woman, too! She's the exact reverse of everything a woman should be—no sweetness, no gentleness. I can't believe she ever brought a child into the world."

"She probably doubts it herself," said Arkwright.

"Why does everybody cringe before her?"

"That's what everybody asks. She hasn't any huge wealth—or birth, either, for that matter. It's just the custom. We defer to her here precisely as we wear claw-hammer coats and low-neck dresses. Nobody thinks of changing the custom."

Josh's lip curled. "Introduce me to her," he said commandingly.

Arkwright looked amused and alarmed. "Not to-night. All in good time. She's the grandmother of a young woman I want you to meet. She's Madam Bowker, and the girl's name is Severence."

"I want to meet that old woman," persisted Josh. Never before had he seen a human being who gave him a sense of doubt as to the superiority of his own will.

"Don't be in too big a hurry for Waterloo," jested Arkwright. "It's coming toward you fast enough. That old lady will put you in your place. After ten minutes of her, you'll feel like a schoolboy who has 'got his' for sassing the teacher."

"I want to meet her," repeated Craig. And he watched her every movement; watched the men and women bowing deferentially about her chair; watched her truly royal dignity, as she was graciously pleased to relax now and then.

"Every society has its mumbo-jumbo to keep it in order," said Arkwright. "She's ours.... I'm dead tired. You've done enough for one night. It's a bad idea to stay too long; it creates an impression of frivolity. Come along!"

Craig went, reluctantly, with several halts and backward glances at the old lady of the ebon staff.

CHAPTER III

A DESPERATE YOUNG WOMAN

The house where the Severances lived, and had lived for half a century, was built by Lucius Quintus Severence, Alabama planter, suddenly and, for the antebellum days, notably rich through a cotton speculation. When he built, Washington had no distinctly fashionable quarter; the neighborhood was then as now small, cheap wooden structures where dwelt in genteel discomfort the families of junior Department clerks. Lucius Quintus chose the site partly for the view, partly because spacious grounds could be had at a nominal figure, chiefly because part of his conception of aristocracy was to dwell in grandeur among the humble. The Severence place, enclosed by a high English-like wall of masonry, filled the whole huge square. On each of its four sides it put in sheepish and chop-fallen countenance a row of boarding houses. In any other city the neighborhood would have been intolerable because of the noise of the rowdy children. But in Washington the boarding house class cannot afford children; so, few indeed were the small forms that paused before the big iron Severence gates to gaze into the mysterious maze of green as far as might be—which was not far, because the walk and the branching drives turn abruptly soon after leaving the gates.

From earliest spring until almost Christmas that mass of green was sweet with perfume and with the songs of appreciative colonies of bright birds. In the midst of the grounds, and ingeniously shut in on all sides from any view that could spoil the illusion of a forest, stood the house, Colonial, creeper-clad, brightened in all its verandas and lawns by gay flowers, pink and white predominating. The rooms were large and lofty of ceiling, and not too uncomfortable in winter, as the family was accustomed to temperatures below the average American indoors. In spring and summer and autumn the rooms were delightful, with their old-fashioned solid furniture, their subdued colors and tints, their elaborate arrangements for regulating the inpour of light. All this suggested wealth. But the Severances were not rich. They had about the same amount of money that old Lucius Quintus had left; but, just as the neighborhood seemed to have degenerated when in fact it had remained all but unchanged, so the Severence fortune seemed to have declined, altogether through changes of standard elsewhere. The Severances were no poorer; simply, other people of their class had grown richer, enormously richer. The Severence homestead, taken by itself and apart from its accidental setting of luxurious grounds, was a third-rate American dwelling-house, fine for a small town, but plain for a city. And the Severence fortune by contrast with the fortunes so lavishly displayed in the fashionable quarter of the capital, was a meager affair, just enough for comfort; it was far too small for the new style of wholesale entertainment which the plutocracy has introduced from England, where the lunacy for aimless and extravagant display rages and ravages in its full horror of witless vulgarity. Thus, the Severences from being leaders twenty years before, had shrunk into "quiet people," were saved from downright obscurity and social neglect only by the indomitable will and tireless energy of old Cornelia Bowker.

Cornelia Bowker was not a Severence; in fact she was by birth indisputably a nobody. Her maiden name was Lard, and the Lards were "poor white trash." By one of those queer freaks wherewith nature loves to make mockery of the struttings of men, she was endowed with ambition and with the intelligence and will to make it effective. Her first ambition was education; by performing labors and sacrifices incredible, she got herself a thorough education. Her next ambition was to be rich; without the beauty that appeals to the senses, she married herself to a rich New Englander, Henry Bowker. Her final and fiercest ambition was social power. She married her daughter to the only son and namesake of Lucius Quintus Severence. The pretensions of aristocracy would soon collapse under the feeble hands of born aristocrats were it not for two things—the passion of the masses of mankind for looking up, and the

frequent infusions into aristocratic veins of vigorous common blood. Cornelia Bowker, born Lard, adored "birth." In fulfilling her third ambition she had herself born again. From the moment of the announcement of her daughter's engagement to Lucius Severence, she ceased to be Lard or Bowker and became Severence, more of a Severence than any of the veritable Severences. Soon after her son-in-law and his father died, she became so much THE Severence that fashionable people forgot her origin, regarded her as the true embodiment of the pride and rank of Severence—and Severence became, thanks wholly to her, a synonym for pride and rank, though really the Severences were not especially blue-blooded.

She did not live with her widowed daughter, as two establishments were more impressive; also, she knew that she was not a livable person—and thought none the worse of herself for that characteristic of strong personalities. In the Severence family, at the homestead, there were, besides five servants, but three persons—the widowed Roxana and her two daughters, Margaret and Lucia—Lucia so named by Madam Bowker because with her birth ended the Severence hopes of a son to perpetuate in the direct line the family Christian name for its chief heir. From the side entrance to the house extended an alley of trees, with white flowering bushes from trunk to trunk like a hedge. At one end of the alley was a pretty, arched veranda of the house, with steps descending; at the other end, a graceful fountain in a circle, round which extended a stone bench. Here Margaret was in the habit of walking every good day, and even in rainy weather, immediately after lunch; and here, on the day after the Burke dance, at the usual time, she was walking, as usual—up and down, up and down, a slow even stride, her arms folded upon her chest, the muscles of her mouth moving as she chewed a wooden tooth-pick toward a pulp. As she walked, her eyes held steady like a soldier's, as if upon the small of the back of an invisible walker in front of her. Lucia, stout, rosy, lazy, sprawling upon the bench, her eyes opening and closing drowsily, watched her sister like a sleepy, comfortable cat. The sunbeams, filtering through the leafy arch, coquetted with Margaret's raven hair, and alternately brightened and shadowed her features. There was little of feminine softness in those unguarded features, much of intense and apparently far from agreeable thought. It was one of her bad days, mentally as well as physically—probably mentally because physically. She had not slept more than two hours at most, and her eyes and skin showed it.

"However do you stand it, Rita!" said Lucia, as Margaret approached the fountain for the thirty-seventh time. "It's so dull and tiring, to walk that way."

"I've got to keep my figure," replied Margaret, dropping her hands to her slender hips, and lifting her shoulders in a movement that drew down her corsets and showed the fine length of her waist.

"That's nonsense," said Lucia. "All we Severences get stout as we grow old. You can't hope to escape."

"Grow old!" Margaret's brow lowered. Then she smiled satirically. "Yes, I AM growing old. I don't dare think how many seasons out, and not married, or even engaged. If we were rich, I'd be a young girl still. As it is, I'm getting on.'"

"Don't you worry about that, Rita," said Lucia. "Don't you let them hurry you into anything desperate. I'm sure _I_ don't want to come out. I hate society and I don't care about men. It's much pleasanter lounging about the house and reading. No dressing—no fussing with clothes and people you hate."

"It isn't fair to you, Lucy," said Margaret. "I don't mind their nagging, but I do mind standing in your way. And they'll keep you back as long as I'm still on the market."

"But I want to be kept back." Lucia spoke almost energetically, half lifting her form whose efflorescence had a certain charm because it was the over-luxuriance of healthy youth. "I shan't marry till I find the right man. I'm a fatalist. I believe there's a man for me somewhere, and that he'll find me, though I was hid—was hid—even here." And she gazed romantically round at the enclosing walls of foliage.

The resolute lines, the "unfeminine" expression disappeared from her sister's face. She laughed softly and tenderly. "What a dear you are!" she cried.

"You can scoff all you please," retorted Lucia, stoutly. "I believe it. We'll see if I'm not right.... How lovely you did look last night!... You wait for your 'right man.' Don't let them hurry you. The most dreadful things happen as the result of girls' hurrying, and then meeting him when it's too late."

"Not to women who have the right sort of pride." Margaret drew herself up, and once more her far-away but decided resemblance to Grandmother Bowker showed itself. "I'd never be weak enough to fall in love unless I wished."

"That's not weakness; it's strength," declared Lucia, out of the fulness of experience gleaned from a hundred novels or more.

Margaret shook her head uncompromisingly. "It'd be weakness for me." She dropped upon the bench beside her sister. "I'm going to marry, and I'm going to superintend your future myself. I'm not going to let them kill all the fine feeling in you, as they've killed it in me."

"Killed it!" said Lucia, reaching out for her sister's hand. "You can't say it's dead, so long as you cry like you did last night, when you came home from the ball."

Margaret reddened angrily, snatched her hand away. "Shame on you!" she cried. "I thought you were above spying."

"The door was open between your bedroom and mine," pleaded Lucia. "I couldn't help hearing."

"You ought to have called out—or closed it. In this family I can't claim even my soul as my own!"

"Please, dear," begged Lucia, sitting up now and struggling to put her arms round her sister, "you don't look on ME as an outsider, do you? Why, I'm the only one in all the world who knows you as you are—how sweet and gentle and noble you are. All the rest think you're cold and cynical, and—"

"So I am," said Margaret reflectively, "except toward only you. I'm grandmother over again, with what she'd call a rotten spot."

"That rotten spot's the real you," protested Lucia.

Margaret broke away from her and resumed her walk. "You'll see," said she, her face stern and bitter once more.

A maidservant descended the steps. "Madam Bowker has come," announced she, "and is asking for you, Miss Rita."

A look that could come only from a devil temper flashed into Margaret's hazel eyes. "Tell her I'm out."

"She saw you from the window."

Margaret debated. Said Lucia, "When she comes so soon after lunch she's always in a frightful mood. She comes then to make a row because, without her after-lunch nap, she's hardly human and can be more—more fiendish."

"I'll not see her," declared Margaret.

"Oh, yes, you will," said Lucia. "Grandmother always has her way."

Margaret turned to the maid. "Tell her I had just gone to my room with a raging headache."

The maid departed. Margaret made a detour, entered the house by the kitchen door and went up to her room. She wrenched off blouse and skirt, got into a dressing sacque and let down her thick black hair. The headache was now real, so upsetting to digestion had been the advent of Madam Bowker, obviously on mischief bent. "She transforms me into a raging devil," thought Margaret, staring at her fiercely sullen countenance in the mirror of the dressing table. "I wish I'd gone in to see her. I'm in just the right humor."

The door opened and Margaret whisked round to blast the intruder who had dared adventure her privacy without knocking. There stood her grandmother—ebon staff in gloved hand—erect, spare body in rustling silk—gray-white hair massed before a sort of turban—steel-blue eyes flashing, delicate nostrils dilating with the breath of battle.

"Ah—Margaret!" said she, and her sharp, quarrel-seeking voice tortured the girl's nerves like the point of a lancet. "They tell me you have a headache." She lifted her lorgnon and scrutinized the pale, angry face of her granddaughter. "I see they were telling me the truth. You are haggard and drawn and distressingly yellow."

The old lady dropped her lorgnon, seated herself. She held her staff out at an angle, as if she were Majesty enthroned to pass judgment of life and death. "You took too much champagne at those vulgar Burkes last night," she proceeded. "It's a vicious thing for a girl to do—vicious in every way. It gives her a reputation, for moral laxity which an unmarried woman can ill-afford to have—unless she has the wealth that makes men indifferent to character.... Why don't you answer?"

Margaret shrugged her shoulders. "You know I detest champagne and never drink it," said she. "And I don't purpose to begin, even to oblige you."

"To oblige me!"

"To give you pretext for contention and nagging and quarreling."

Madam Bowker was now in the element she had been seeking—the stormy sea of domestic wrangling. She struck out boldly, with angry joy. "I've long since learned not to expect gratitude from you. I can't understand my own weakness, my folly, in continuing to labor with you."

"That's very simple," said Margaret. "I'm the one human being you can't compel by hook or crook to bow to your will. You regard me as unfinished business."

Madam Bowker smiled grimly at this shrewd analysis. "I want to see you married and properly settled in life. I want to end this disgrace. I want to save you from becoming ridiculous and contemptible—an object of laughter and of pity."

"You want to see me married to some man I dislike and should soon hate."

"I want to see you married," retorted the old lady. "I can't be held responsible for your electing to hate whatever is good for you. And I came to tell you that my patience is about exhausted. If you are not engaged by the end of this season, I wash my hands of you. I have been spending a great deal of money in the effort to establish you. You are a miserable failure socially. You attach only worthless men. You drive away the serious men."

"Stupid, you mean."

"I mean serious—the men looking for wives. Men who have something and have a right to aspire to the hand of MY grandchild. The only men who have a right to take the time of an unmarried woman. You either cannot, or will not, exert yourself to please. You avoid young girls and young men. You waste your life with people already settled. You have taken on the full airs and speech of a married woman, in advance of having a husband—and that is folly bordering on insanity. You have discarded everything that men—marrying men—the right sort of men—demand in maidenhood. I repeat, you are a miserable failure."

"A miserable failure," echoed Margaret, staring dismally into the glass.

"And I repeat," continued the old lady, somewhat less harshly, though not less resolutely, "this season ends it. You must marry or I'll stop your allowance. You'll have to look to your mother for your dresses and hats and gee-gaws. When I think of the thousands of dollars I've wasted on you—It's cheating—it's cheating! You have been stealing from me!" Madam Bowker's tone was almost unladylike; her ebon staff was flourishing threateningly.

Margaret started up. "I warned you at the outset!" she cried. "I took nothing from you that you didn't force on me. And now, when you've made dress, and all that, a necessity for me, you are going to snatch it away!"

"Giving you money for dress is wasting it," cried the old lady. "What is dress for? Pray why, do you imagine, have I provided you with three and four dozen expensive dresses a year and hats and lingerie and everything in proportion? Just to gratify your vanity? No, indeed! To enable you to get a husband, one able to provide for you as befits your station. And because I have been generous with you, because I have spared no expense in keeping you up to your station, in giving you opportunity, you turn on me and revile me!"

"You HAVE been generous, Grandmother," said Margaret, humbly. There had risen up before her a hundred extravagances in which the old lady had indulged her—things quite unnecessary for show, the intimate luxuries that contribute only indirectly to show by aiding in giving the feeling and air of refinement. It was of these luxuries that Margaret was especially fond; and her grandmother, with an instinct that those tastes of Margaret's proved her indeed a lady—and made it impossible that she should marry, or even think of marrying, "foolishly"—had been most graciously generous in gratifying them. Now, these luxuries were to be withdrawn, these pampered tastes were to be starved. Margaret collapsed despairingly upon her table. "I wish to marry, Heaven knows! Only—only—" She raised herself; her lip quivered—"Good God, Grandmother, I CAN'T give myself to a man who repels me! You make me hate men—marriage—everything of that kind. Sometimes I long to hide in a convent!"

"You can indulge that longing after the end of this season," said her grandmother. "You'll certainly hardly dare show yourself in Washington, where you have become noted for your dress.... That's what exasperates me against you! No girl appreciates refinement and luxury more than you do. No woman has better taste, could use a large income to better advantage. And you have intelligence. You know you must have a competent husband. Yet you fritter away your opportunities. A very short time, and you'll be a worn, faded old maid, and the settled people who profess to be so fond of you will be laughing at you, and deriding you, and pitying you."

Deriding! Pitying!

"I've no patience with the women of that clique you're so fond of," the old lady went on. "If the ideas they profess—the shallow frauds that they are!—were to prevail, what would become of women of our station? Women should hold themselves dear, should encourage men in that old-time reverence for the sex and its right to be sheltered and worshiped and showered with luxury. As for you—a poor girl—countenancing such low and ruinous views—Is it strange I am disgusted with you? Have you no pride—no self-respect?"

Margaret sat motionless, gazing into vacancy. She could not but endorse every word her grandmother was saying. She had heard practically those same words often, but they had had no effect; now, toward the end of this her least successful season, with most of her acquaintances married off, and enjoying and flaunting the luxury she might have had—for, they had married men, of "the right sort"—"capable husbands"—men who had been more or less attentive to her—now, these grim and terrible axioms of worldly wisdom, of upper class honor, from her grandmother sounded in her ears like the boom of surf on reefs in the ears of the sailor.

A long miserable silence; then, her grandmother: "What do you purpose to do, Margaret?"

"To hustle," said the girl with a short, bitter laugh. "I must rope in somebody. Oh, I've been realizing, these past two months. I'm awake at last."

Madam Bowker studied the girl's face, gave a sigh of relief. "I feel greatly eased," said she. "I see you are coming to your senses before it's too late. I knew you would. You have inherited too much of my nature, of my brain and my character."

Margaret faced the old woman in sudden anger. "If you had made allowances for that, if you had reasoned with me quietly, instead of nagging and bullying and trying to compel, all this might have been settled long ago." She shrugged her shoulders. "But that's past and done. I'm going to do my best. Only—I warn you, don't try to drive me! I'll not be driven!"

"What do you think of Grant Arkwright?" asked her grandmother.

"I intend to marry him," replied Margaret.

The old lady's stern eyes gleamed delight.

"But," Margaret hastened to add, "you mustn't interfere. He doesn't like you. He's afraid of you. If you give the slightest sign, he'll sheer off. You must let me handle him."

"The insolent puppy," muttered Madam Bowker. "I've always detested him."

"You don't want me to marry him?"

"On the contrary," the old lady replied. "He would make the best possible husband for you." She smiled like a grand inquisitor at prospect of a pleasant day with rack and screw. "He needs a firm hand," said she.

Margaret burst out laughing at this implied compliment to herself; then she colored as with shame and turned away. "What frauds we women are!" she exclaimed. "If I had any sense of decency left, I'd be ashamed to do it!"

"There you go again!" cried her grandmother. "You can't be practical five minutes in succession. Why should a woman be ashamed to do a man a service in spite of himself? Men are fools where women are concerned. I never knew one that was not. And the more sensible they are in other respects, the bigger fools they are about us! Left to themselves, they always make a mess of marriage. They think they know what they want, but they don't. We have to teach them. A man needs a firm hand during courtship, and a firmer hand after marriage. So many wives forget their duty and relax. If you don't take hold of that young Arkwright, he'll no doubt fall a victim to some unscrupulous hussy."

Unscrupulous hussy! Margaret looked at herself in the mirror, met her own eyes with a cynical laugh. "Well, I'm no worse than the others," she added, half to herself. Presently she said, "Grant is coming this afternoon. I look a fright. I must take a headache powder and get some sleep." Her grandmother rose instantly. "Yes, you do look badly—for you. And Arkwright has very keen eyes—thanks to those silly women of your set who teach men things they have no business to know." She advanced and kissed her granddaughter graciously on top of the head. "I am glad to see my confidence in you was not misplaced, Margaret," said she. "I could not believe I was so utterly mistaken in judgment of character. I'll go to your mother and take her for a drive."

CHAPTER IV

"HE ISN'T LIKE US"

Margaret continued to sit there, her elbows on the dressing-table, her knuckles pressing into her cheeks, the hazel eyes gazing at their reflection in the mirror. "What is it in me," she said to her image, "that makes me less successful at drawing men to the point than so many girls who are no better looking than I?" And she made an inventory of her charms that was creditably free from vanity. "And men certainly like to talk to me," she pursued. "The fish bite, but the hook doesn't hold. Perhaps—probably—I'm not sentimental enough. I don't simper and pretend innocence and talk tommy rot—and listen to it as if I were eating honey."

This explanation was not altogether satisfactory, however. She felt that, if she had a certain physical something, which she must lack, nothing else would matter—nothing she said or did. It was baffling; for, there, before her eyes were precisely the charms of feature and figure that in other women, in far less degree, had set men, many men, quite beside themselves. Her lip curled, and her eyes laughed satirically as she thought of the follies of those men—how they had let women lead them up and down in public places, drooling and sighing and seeming to enjoy their own pitiful plight. If that expression of satire had not disappeared so quickly, she might have got at the secret of her "miserable failure." For, it was her habit of facing men with only lightly veiled amusement, or often frank ridicule, in her eyes, in the curve of her lips, that frightened them off, that gave them the uneasy sense that their assumptions of superiority to the female were being judged and derided.

But time was flying. It was after three; the headache was still pounding in her temples, and her eyes did look almost as haggard and her skin almost as sallow as her grandmother had said. She took an anti-pyrene powder from a box in her dressing-table, threw off all her clothes, swathed herself in a long robe of pale-blue silk. She locked the door into the hall, and went into her bedroom, closed the door between. She put the powder in water, drank it, dropped down upon a lounge at the foot of her bed and covered herself. The satin pillow against her cheek, the coolness and softness of the silk all along and around her body, were deliciously soothing. Her blood beat less fiercely, and somber thoughts drew slowly away into a vague cloud at the horizon of her mind. Lying there, with senses soothed by luxury and deadened to pain by the drug, she felt so safe, so shut-in against all intrusion. In a few hours the struggle, the bitterness would begin again; but at least here was this interval of repose, of freedom. Only when she was thus alone did she ever get that most voluptuous of all sensations—freedom. Freedom and luxury! "I'm afraid I can't eat my cake and have it, too," she mused drowsily. "Well—whether or not I can have freedom, at least I MUST have luxury. I'm afraid Grant can't give me nearly all I want—who could?... If I had the courage—Craig could make more than Grant has, if he were put to it. I'm sure he could. I'm sure he could do almost anything—but be attractive to a woman. No, Craig is too strong a dose—besides, there's the risk. Grant is safest. Better a small loaf than—than no Paris dresses."

Arkwright, entering Mrs. Severence's drawing-room with Craig at half-past five, found a dozen people there. Most of them were of that young married set which Margaret preferred, to the anger and disgust of her grandmother and against the entreaties of her own common sense. "The last place in the world to look for a husband," Madam Bowker had said again and again, to both her daughter and her granddaughter. "Their talk is all in ridicule of marriage, and of every sacred thing. And if there are any bachelors, they have come—well, certainly not in search of honorable wedlock."

The room was noisily gay; but Margaret, at the tea-table in a rather somber brown dress with a big brown hat, whose great plumes shadowed her pale, somewhat haggard face, was evidently not in one of her sparkling moods. The headache powder and the nap had not been successful. She greeted Arkwright with a slight, absent smile, seemed hardly to note Craig, as Arkwright presented him.

"Sit down here beside Miss Severence," Grant said.

"Yes, do," acquiesced Margaret; and Joshua thought her cold and haughty, an aristocrat of the unapproachable type, never natural and never permitting others to be natural.

"And tell her all about yourself," continued Grant.

"My friend Josh, here," he explained to Margaret, "is one of those serious, absorbed men who concentrate entirely upon themselves. It isn't egotism; it's genius."

Craig was ruffled and showed it. He did not like persiflage; it seemed an assault upon dignity, and in those early days in Washington he was full of dignity and of determination to create a dignified impression. He reared haughtily and looked about with arrogant, disdainful eyes.

"Will you have tea?" said Miss Severence, as Arkwright moved away.

"No, thanks," replied Craig. "Tea's for the women and the children."

Miss Severence's expression made him still more uncomfortable. "Well," said she, "if you should feel dry as you tell me about yourself, there's whiskey over on that other table. A cigarette? No? I'm afraid I can't ask you to have a cigar—"

"And take off my coat, and put my feet up, and be at home!" said Craig. "I see you think I'm a boor."

"Don't you want people to think you a boor?" inquired she with ironic seriousness.

He looked at her sharply. "You're laughing at me," he said, calmly. "Now, wouldn't it be more ladylike for you to try to put me at my ease? I'm in your house, you know."

Miss Severence flushed. "I beg your pardon," she said. "I did not mean to offend."

"No," replied Craig. "You simply meant to amuse yourself with me. And because I don't know what to do with my hands and because my coat fits badly, you thought I wouldn't realize what you were doing. You are very narrow—you fashionable people. You don't even know that everybody ought to be judged on his own ground. To size up a race-horse, you don't take him into a drawing room. And it wouldn't be quite fair, would it, for me to judge these drawing-room dolls by what they could do out among real men and women? You—for instance. How would you show up, if you had to face life with no husband and no money and five small children, as my mother did? Well, SHE won out."

Miss Severence was not attracted; but she was interested. She saw beyond the ill-fitting frock-coat, and the absurd manner, thoroughly ill at ease, trying to assume easy, nonchalant man-of-the-world airs. "I'd never have thought of judging you except on your own ground," said she, "if you hadn't invited the comparison."

"You mean, by getting myself up in these clothes and coming here?"

"Yes."

"You're right, young lady," said Craig, clapping her on the arm, and waving an energetic forefinger almost in her face. "And as soon as I can decently get away, I'll go. I told Arkwright I had no business to come here."

Miss Severance colored, drew her arm away, froze. She detested all forms of familiarity; physical familiarity she abhorred. "You have known Grant Arkwright long?" she said, icily.

"NOW, what have I done?" demanded Joshua.

She eyed him with a lady's insolent tranquillity. "Nothing," replied she. "We are all so glad Grant has come back."

Craig bit his lip and his tawny, weather-beaten skin reddened. He stared with angry envy at Arkwright, so evidently at ease and at home in the midst of a group on the other side of the room. In company, practically all human beings are acutely self-conscious. But self-consciousness is of two kinds. Arkwright, assured that his manners were correct and engaging, that his dress was all it should be, or could be, that his position was secure and admired, had the self-consciousness of self-complacence. Joshua's consciousness of himself was the extreme of the other kind—like a rat's in a trap.

"You met Mr. Arkwright out West—out where you live?"

"Yes," said Craig curtly, almost surlily.

"I was out there once," pursued the young woman, feeling that in her own house she must do her best with the unfortunate young man. "And, curiously enough, I heard you speak. We all admired you very much."

Craig cheered up instantly; he was on his own ground now. "How long ago?" he asked.

"Three years; two years last September."

"Oh, I was a mere boy then. You ought to hear me now."

And Joshua launched forth into a description of his oratory, then related how he had won over juries in several important cases. His arms, his hands were going, his eyes were glistening, his voice had that rich, sympathetic tone which characterizes the egotist when the subject is himself. Miss Severence listened without comment; indeed, he was not sure that she was listening, so conventional was her expression. But, though she was careful to keep her face a blank, her mind was busy. Surely not since the gay women of Barras's court laughed at the megalomaniac ravings of a noisy, badly dressed, dirty young lieutenant named Buonaparte, had there been a vanity so candid, so voluble, so obstreperous. Nor did he talk of himself in a detached way, as if he were relating the performances and predicting the glory of a human being who happened to have the same name as himself. No, he thrust upon her in every sentence that he, he himself and none other, had said and done all these splendid startling things, would do more, and more splendid. She listened, astounded; she wondered why she did not burst out laughing in his very face, why, on the contrary, she seemed to accept to a surprising extent his own estimate of himself.

"He's a fool," thought she, "one of the most tedious fools I ever met. But I was right; he's evidently very much of a somebody. However does he get time to DO anything, when he's so busy admiring himself? How does he ever contrive to take his mind off himself long enough to think of anything else?"

Nearly an hour later Arkwright came for him, cut him off in the middle of an enthusiastic description of how he had enchained and enthralled a vast audience in the biggest hall in St. Paul. "We must go, this instant," said Arkwright. "I had no idea it was so late."

"I'll see you soon again, no doubt, Mr. Craig," said Miss Severence, polite but not cordial, as she extended her hand.

"Yes," replied Craig, holding the hand, and rudely not looking at her but at Arkwright. "You've interrupted us in a very interesting talk, Grant."

Grant and Margaret exchanged smiles, Margaret disengaged her hand, and the two men went. As they were strolling down the drive, Grant said: "Well, what did you think of her?"

"A nobody—a nothing," was Craig's wholly unexpected response. "Homely—at least insignificant. Bad color. Dull eyes. Bad manners. A poor specimen, even of this poor fashionable society of yours. An empty-head."

"Well—well—WELL!" exclaimed Arkwright in derision. "Yet you and she seemed to be getting on beautifully together."

"I did all the talking."

"You always do."

"But it was the way she listened. I felt as if I were rehearsing in a vacant room."

"Humph," grunted Arkwright.

He changed the subject. The situation was one that required thought, plan. "She's just the girl for Josh," said he to himself. "And he must take her. Of course, he's not the man for her. She couldn't care for him, not in a thousand years. What woman with a sense of humor could? But she's got to marry somebody that can give her what she must have.... It's very important whom a man marries, but it's not at all important whom a woman marries. The world wasn't made for them, but for US!"

At Vanderman's that night he took Mrs. Tate in to dinner, but Margaret was on his left. "When does your Craig make his speech before the Supreme Court?" asked she.

He inspected her with some surprise. "Tuesday, I think. Why?"

"I promised him I'd go."

"And will you?"

"Certainly. Why not?"

This would never do. Josh would get the impression she was running after him, and would be more contemptuous than ever. "I shouldn't, if I were you."

"Why not?"

"Well, he's very vain, as you perhaps discovered. He might misunderstand."

"And why should that disturb me?" asked she, tranquilly. "I do as I please. I don't concern myself about what others think. Your friend interests me. I've a curiosity to see whether he has improved in the last two or three years as much as he says he has."

"He told you all about himself?"

"Everything—and nothing."

"That's just it!" exclaimed Arkwright, misunderstanding her. "After he has talked me into a state of collapse, every word about himself and his career, I think it all over, and wonder whether there's anything to the man or not. Sometimes I think there's a real person beneath that flow of vanity. Then, again, I think not."

"Whether he's an accident or a plan," mused the young woman; but she saw that Arkwright did not appreciate the cleverness and the penetration of her remark. Indeed, she knew in advance that he would not, for she knew his limitations. "Now," thought she, "Craig would have appreciated it—and clapped me on the arm—or knee."

"Did you like Josh?" Grant was inquiring.

"Very much, indeed."

"Of course," said Arkwright satirically.

"He has ability to do things. He has strength.... He isn't like us."

Arkwright winced. "I'm afraid you exaggerate him, merely because he's different."

"He makes me feel an added contempt for myself, somehow. Doesn't he you?"

"I can't say he does," replied Arkwright, irritated. "I appreciate his good qualities, but I can't help being offended and disturbed for him by his crudities. He has an idea that to be polite and well-dressed is to be weak and worthless. And I can't get it out of his head."

Margaret's smile irritated him still further. "All great men are more or less rude and crude, aren't they?" said she. "They are impatient of the trifles we lay so much stress on."

"So, you think Josh is a great man?"

"I don't know," replied Margaret, with exasperating deliberateness. "I want to find out."

"And if you decide that he is, you'll marry him?"

"Perhaps. You suggested it the other day."

"In jest," said Arkwright, unaccountably angry with her, with himself, with Joshua. "As soon as I saw him in your presence, I knew it wouldn't do. It'd be giving a piece of rare, delicate porcelain to a grizzly as a plaything."

He was surprised at himself. Now that he was face to face with a possibility of her adopting his own proposition, he disliked it intensely. He looked at her; never had she seemed so alluring, so representative of what he called distinction. At the very idea of such refinement at the mercy of the coarse and boisterous Craig, his blood boiled. "Josh is a fine, splendid chap, as a man among men," said he to himself. "But to marry this dainty aristocrat to him—it'd be a damned disgraceful outrage. He's not fit to marry among OUR women.... What a pity such a stunning girl shouldn't have the accessories to make her eligible." And he hastily turned his longing eyes away, lest she should see and attach too much importance to a mere longing—for, he felt it would be a pitiful weakness, a betrayal of opportunity, for him to marry, in a mood of passion that passes, a woman who was merely well born, when he had the right to demand both birth and wealth in his wife.

"I've often thought," pursued Margaret, "that to be loved by a man of the Craig sort would be—interesting."

"While being loved by one of your own sort would be dull?" suggested Arkwright with a strained smile.

Margaret shrugged her bare white shoulders in an inflammatory assent. "Will you go with me to the Supreme Court on Tuesday?"

"Delighted," said Arkwright. And he did not realize that the deep-hidden source of his enthusiasm was a belief that Josh Craig would make an ass of himself.

CHAPTER V

ALMOST HOOKED

In human affairs, great and small, there are always many reasons for every action; then, snugly tucked away underneath all these reasons that might be and ought to be and pretend to be but aren't, hides the real reason, the real moving cause of action. By tacit agreement among human beings there is an unwritten law against the exposing of this real reason, whose naked and ugly face would put in sorry countenance professions of patriotism or philanthropy or altruism or virtue of whatever kind. Stillwater, the Attorney-General and Craig's chief, had a dozen reasons for letting him appear alone for the Administration—that is, for the people—in that important case. Each of these reasons—except one—shed a pure, white light upon Stillwater's public spirit and private generosity. That one was the reason supposed by Mrs. Stillwater to be real. "Since you don't seem able to get rid of Josh Craig, Pa," said she, in the seclusion of the marital couch, "we might as well marry him to Jessie"—Jessie being their homeliest daughter.

"Very well," said "Pa" Stillwater. "I'll give him a chance."

Still, we have not got the real reason for Josh's getting what Stillwater had publicly called "the opportunity of a lifetime." The really real reason was that Stillwater wished, and calculated, to kill a whole flock of birds with one stone.

Whenever the people begin to clamor for justice upon their exploiters, the politicians, who make themselves valuable to the exploiters by cozening the people into giving them office, begin by denying that the people want anything; when the clamor grows so loud that this pretense is no longer tenable, they hasten to say, "The people are right, and something must be done. Unfortunately, there is no way of legally doing anything at present, and we must be patient until a way is discovered." Way after way is suggested, only to be dismissed as "dangerous" or "impractical" or "unconstitutional." The years pass; the clamor persists, becomes imperious. The politicians pass a law that has been carefully made unconstitutional. This gives the exploiters several years more of license. Finally, public sentiment compels the right kind of law; it is passed. Then come the obstacles to enforcement. More years of delay; louder clamor. A Stillwater is put in charge of the enforcement of the law; a case is made, a trial is had, and the evidence is so incomplete or the people's lawyers so poorly matched against the lawyers of the exploiters that the case fails, and the administration is able to say, "You see, WE'VE done our best, but the rascals have escaped!" The case against certain Western railway thieves had reached the stage at which the only way the exploiters could be protected from justice was by having a mock trial; and Stillwater had put Craig forward as the conductor of this furious sham battle, had armed him with a poor gun, loaded with blanks. "We'll lose the case," calculated Stillwater; "we'll save our friends, and get rid of Craig, whom everybody will blame—the damned, bumptious, sophomoric blow-hard!"

What excuse did Stillwater make to himself for himself in this course of seeming treachery and assassination? For, being a man of the highest principles, he would not deliberately plan an assassination as an assassination. Why, his excuse was that the popular clamor against the men "who had built up the Western country" was wicked, that he was serving his country in denying the mob "the blood of our best citizens," that Josh Craig was a demagogue who richly deserved to be hoist by his own petar. He laughed with patriotic glee as he thought how "Josh, the joke" would make a fool of himself with silly, sophomoric arguments, would with his rude tactlessness get upon the nerves of the finicky old Justices of the Supreme Court!

As Craig had boasted right and left of the "tear" he was going to make, and had urged everybody he talked with to come and hear him, the small courtroom was uncomfortably full, and not a few of the smiling, whispering spectators

confidently expected that they were about to enjoy that rare, delicious treat—a conceited braggart publicly exposed and overwhelmed by himself. Among these spectators was Josh's best friend, Arkwright, seated beside Margaret Severence, and masking his satisfaction over the impending catastrophe with an expression of funereal somberness. He could not quite conceal from himself all these hopes that had such an uncomfortable aspect of ungenerousness. So he reasoned with himself that they really sprang from a sincere desire for his friend's ultimate good. "Josh needs to have his comb cut," thought he. "It's sure to be done, and he can bear it better now than later. The lesson will teach him a few things he must learn. I only hope he'll be able to profit by it."

When Josh appeared, Grant and the others with firmly-fixed opinions of the character of the impending entertainment were not a little disquieted. Joshua Craig, who stepped into the arena, looked absolutely different from the Josh they knew. How had he divested himself of that familiar swaggering, bustling braggadocio? Where had he got this look of the strong man about to run a race, this handsome face on which sat real dignity and real power? Never was there a better court manner; the Justices, who had been anticipating an opportunity to demonstrate, at his expense, the exceeding dignity of the Supreme Court, could only admire and approve. As for his speech, it was a straightway argument; not a superfluous or a sophomoric word, not an attempt at rhetoric. His argument—There is the logic that is potent but answerable; there is the logic that is unanswerable, that gives no opportunity to any sane mind, however prejudiced by association with dispensers of luxurious hospitality, of vintage wines and dollar cigars, however enamored of fog-fighting and hair-splitting, to refuse the unqualified assent of conviction absolute. That was the kind of argument Josh Craig made. And the faces of the opposing lawyers, the questions the Justices asked him plainly showed that he had won.

After the first ten minutes, when the idea that Craig could be or ever had been laughable became itself absurd, Arkwright glanced uneasily, jealously at Margaret. The face beneath the brim of her beautiful white and pale pink hat was cold, conventional, was the face of a mere listener. Grant, reassured, resumed his absorbed attention, was soon completely swept away by his friend's exhibition of power, could hardly wait until he and Margaret were out of the courtroom before exploding in enthusiasm. "Isn't he a wonder?" he cried. "Why, I shouldn't have believed it possible for a man of his age to make such a speech. He's a great lawyer as well as a great orator. It was a dull subject, yet I was fascinated. Weren't you?"

"It was interesting—at times," said Margaret.

"At times! Oh, you women!"

At this scorn Margaret eyed his elegant attire, his face with its expression of an intelligence concentrated upon the petty and the paltry. Her eyes suggested a secret amusement so genuine that she could not venture to reveal it in a gibe. She merely said: "I confess I was more interested in him than in what he said."

"Of course! Of course!" said Grant, all unconscious of her derision. "Women have no interest in serious things and no mind for logic."

She decided that it not only was prudent but also was more enjoyable to keep to herself her amusement at his airs of masculine superiority. Said she, her manner ingenuous: "It doesn't strike me as astonishing that a man should make a sensible speech."

Grant laughed as if she had said something much cleverer than she could possibly realize. "That's a fact," admitted he. "It was simply supreme common-sense. What a world for twaddle it is when common-sense makes us sit up and stare.... But it's none the less true that you're prejudiced against him."

"Why do you say that?"

"If you appreciated him you'd be as enthusiastic as I." There was in his tone a faint hint of his unconscious satisfaction in her failure to appreciate Craig.

"You can go very far astray," said she, "you, with your masculine logic."

But Grant had guessed aright. Margaret had not listened attentively to the speech because it interested her less than the man himself. She had concentrated wholly upon him. Thus, alone of all the audience, she had seen that Craig was playing a carefully-rehearsed part, and, himself quite unmoved, was watching and profiting by every hint in the countenance of his audience, the old Justices. It was an admirable piece of acting; it was the performance of a genius at the mummer's art. But the power of the mummer lies in the illusion he creates; if he does not create illusion, as Craig did not for Margaret, he becomes mere pantomimist and mouther. She had never given a moment's thought to public life as a career; she made no allowances for the fact that a man's public appearances, no matter how sincere he is, must always be carefully rehearsed if he is to use his powers with unerring effect; she was simply like a child for the first time at the theater, and, chancing to get a glimpse behind the scenes, disgusted and angry with the players because their performance is not spontaneous. If she had stopped to reason about the matter she would have been less uncompromising. But in the shock of disillusionment she felt only that the man was working upon his audience like a sleight-of-hand performer; and the longer she observed, and the stronger his spell over the others, the deeper became her contempt for the "charlatan." He seemed to her like one telling a lie—as that one seems, while telling it, to the hearer who is not deceived. "I've been thinking him rough but genuine," said she to herself. "He's merely rough." She had forgiven, had disregarded his rude almost coarse manners, setting them down to indifference, the impatience of the large with the little, a revolt from the (on the whole preferable) extreme opposite of the mincing, patterned manners of which Margaret herself was a-weary. "But he isn't indifferent at all," she now felt. "He's simply posing. His rudenesses are deliberate where they are not sheer ignorance. His manner in court showed that he knows how, in the main."

A rather superior specimen of the professional politician, but distinctly of that hypocritical, slippery class. And Margaret's conviction was strengthened later in the day when she came upon him at tea at Mrs. Houghton's. He was holding forth noisily against "society," was denouncing it as a debaucher of manhood and womanhood, a waster of precious time, and on and on in that trite and tedious strain. Margaret's lip curled as she listened. What did this fakir

know about manhood and womanhood? And could there be any more pitiful, more paltry wasting of time than in studying out and performing such insincerities as his life was made up of? True, Mrs. Houghton, of those funny, fashionable New Yorkers who act as if they had only just arrived at the estate of servants and carriages, and are always trying to impress even passing strangers with their money and their grandeur—true, Mrs. Houghton was most provocative to anger or amused disdain at the fashionable life. But not even Mrs. Houghton seemed to Margaret so cheap and pitiful as this badly-dressed, mussy politician, as much an actor as Mrs. Houghton and as poor at the trade, but choosing low comedy for his unworthy attempts where Mrs. Houghton was at least trying to be something refined.

With that instinct for hostility which is part of the equipment of every sensitively-nerved man of action, Craig soon turned toward her, addressed himself to her; and the others, glad to be free, fell away. Margaret was looking her best. White was extremely becoming to her; pink—pale pink—being next in order. Her dress was of white, with facings of delicate pale pink, and the white plumes in her hat were based in pale pink, which also lined the inside of the brim. She watched him, and, now that it was once more his personality pitted directly and wholly against hers, she, in spite of herself, began to yield to him again her respect—the respect every intelligent person must feel for an individuality that is erect and strong. But as she was watching, her expression was that of simply listening, without comment or intention to reply—an expression of which she was perfect mistress. Her hazel eyes, set in dark lashes, her sensuous mouth, her pallid skin, smooth and healthy, seemed the climax of allurement to which all the lines of her delightful figure pointed. To another woman it would have been obvious that she was amusing herself by trying to draw him under the spell of physical attraction; a man would have thought her a mere passive listener, perhaps one concealing boredom, would have thought her movements to bring now this charm and now that to his attention were simply movements of restlessness, indications of an impatience difficult to control. He broke off abruptly. "What are you thinking?" he demanded.

She gave no sign of triumph at having accomplished her purpose—at having forced his thoughts to leave his pet subject, himself, and center upon her. "I was thinking," said she reflectively, "what a brave whistler you are."

"Whistler?"

"Whistling to keep up your courage. No, rather, whistling FOR courage. You are on your knees before wealth and social position, and you wish to convince yourself—and the world—that you despise them."

"_I_? Wealth? Social position?" Craig exclaimed, or rather, blustered. And, red and confused, he was at a loss for words.

"Yes—you," asserted she, in her quiet, tranquil way. "Don't bluster at me. You didn't bluster at the Court this morning." She laughed softly, eyeing him with friendly sarcasm. "You see, I'm 'on to' you, Mr. Craig."

Their eyes met—a resolute encounter. He frowned fiercely, and as his eyes were keen and blue-green, and, backed by a tremendous will, the odds seemed in his favor. But soon his frown relaxed; a smile replaced it—a handsome acknowledgment of defeat, a humorous confession that she was indeed "on to" him. "I like you," he said graciously.

"I don't know that I can say the same of you," replied she, no answering smile in her eyes or upon her lips, but a seriousness far more flattering.

"That's right!" exclaimed he. "Frankness—absolute frankness. You are the only intelligent woman I have met here who seems to have any sweetness left in her."

"Sweetness? This is a strange place to look for sweetness. One might as well expect to find it in a crowd of boys scrapping for pennies, or in a pack of hounds chasing a fox."

"But that isn't all of life," protested Craig.

"It's all of life among our sort of people—the ambitious socially and otherwise."

Josh beamed upon her admiringly. "You'll do," approved he. "We shall be friends. We ARE friends."

The gently satiric smile her face had borne as she was talking became personal to him. "You are confident," said she.

He nodded emphatically. "I am. I always get what I want."

"I'm sorry to say I don't. But I can say that at least I never take what I don't want."

"That means," said he, "you may not want my friendship."

"Obviously," replied she. And she rose and put out her hand.

"Don't go yet," cried he. "We are just beginning to get acquainted. The other day I misjudged you. I thought you insignificant, not worth while."

She slid her hand into her ermine muff. She gave him an icy look, not contemptuous but oblivious, and turned away. He stared after her. "By Jove!" thought he, "THERE'S the real thing. There's a true aristocrat." And he frankly paid aristocracy in thought the tribute he would with any amount of fuming and spluttering have denied it in word. "Aristocracy does mean something," reflected he. "There must be substance to what can make ME feel quite put down."

When he saw Arkwright he said patronizingly: "I like that little friend of yours—that Miss What's-her-name."

Grant suspected from his tone that this forgetfulness was an affectation. "You know very well what her name is," said he irritably. "What a cheap affectation."

Josh countered and returned magnificently: "I remember her face perfectly," said he. "One shares one's name with

a great many people, so it's unimportant. But one's face is one's own. I remember her face very well indeed—and that gorgeous figure of hers."

Grant was furious, thought Craig's words the limit of impertinent free-spokenness. "Well, what of it?" said he savagely.

"I like her," replied Josh condescendingly. "But she's been badly brought up, and is full of foolish ideas, like all your women here. But she's a thoroughbred."

"Then you like her?" observed Arkwright without enthusiasm.

"So-so. Of course, she isn't fit to be a wife, but for her type and as a type she's splendid."

Arkwright felt like kicking him and showed it. "What a bounder you are at times, Josh," he snapped.

Craig laughed and slapped him on the back. "There you go again, with your absurd notions of delicacy. Believe me, Grant, you don't understand women. They don't like you delicate fellows. They like a man—like me—a pawer of the ground—a snorter—a warhorse that cries ha-ha among the trumpets."

"The worst thing about what you say," replied Arkwright sourly, "is that it's the truth. I don't say the women aren't worthy of us, but I do say they're not worthy of our opinion of them.... Well, I suppose you're going to try to marry her"—this with a vicious gleam which he felt safe in indulging openly before one so self-absorbed and so insensible to subtleties of feeling and manner.

"I think not," said Craig judicially. "She'd play hell with my politics. It's bad enough to have fights on every hand and all the time abroad. It'd be intolerable to have one at home—and I've got no time to train her to my uses and purposes."

Usually Craig's placid conviction that the universe existed for his special benefit and that anything therein was his for the mere formality of claiming it moved Arkwright to tolerant amusement at his lack of the sense of proportion and humor. Occasionally it moved him to reluctant admiration—this when some apparently absurd claim of his proved more or less valid. Just now, in the matter of Margaret Severence, this universal overlordship filled him with rage, the more furious that he realized he could no more shake Josh's conviction than he could make the Washington monument topple over into the Potomac by saying, "Be thou removed." He might explain all the obvious reasons why Margaret would never deign to condescend to him; Josh would dismiss them with a laugh at Arkwright's folly.

He hid his rage as best he could, and said with some semblance of genial sarcasm: "So all you've got to do is to ask her and she's yours?"

Craig gave him a long, sharp, searching look. "Old man," he said earnestly, "do you want her?"

"_I_!" exclaimed Arkwright angrily, but with shifting eyes and with upper lip twitching guiltily. Then, satirically: "Oh, no; I'd not dare aspire to any woman YOU had condescended to smile upon."

"If you do I'll get her for you," pursued Craig, his hand seeking Arkwright's arm to grip it.

Arkwright drew away, laughed outright. "You ARE a joke!" he cried, wholly cured of his temper by the preposterous offer. It would be absurd enough for any one to imagine he would need help in courting any woman he might fancy—he, one of the most eligible of American bachelors. It passed the uttermost bounds of the absurd, this notion that he would need help with a comparatively poor girl, many seasons out and eager to marry. And then, climax of climaxes, that Josh Craig could help him! "Yes, a joke," he repeated.

"Oh, no doubt I do seem so to you," replied Josh unruffled. "People are either awed or amused by what they're incapable of understanding. At this stage of my career I'm not surprised to find they're amused. But wait, my boy. Meanwhile, if you want that lady, all you've got to do is to say the word. I'll get her for you."

"Thanks; no," said Arkwright. "I'm rather shy of matrimony. I don't hanker after the stupid joys of family life, as you do."

"That's because of your ruinous, rotten training," Craig assured him. "It has destroyed your power to appreciate the great fundamentals of life. You think you're superior. If you only knew how shallow you are!"

"I've a competent valet," said Arkwright. "And your idea of a wife seems to be a sort of sublimated valet—and nurse."

"I can conceive of no greater dignity than to take care of a real man and his children," replied Craig. "However, the dignity of the service depends upon the dignity of the person to whom it is rendered—and upon the dignity of the person who renders it."

Arkwright examined Craig's face for signs that this was the biting sarcasm it would have seemed, coming from another. But Craig was apparently merely making one of his familiar bumptious speeches. The idea of a man of his humble origin proclaiming himself superior to an Arkwright of the Massachusetts Arkwrights!

"No, I'd not marry your Miss Severence," Craig continued. "I want a wife, not a social ornament. I want a woman, not a toilette. I want a home, not a fashionable hotel. I want love and sympathy and children. I want substance, not shadow; sanity, not silliness."

"And your socks darned and your shirts mended."

"That, of course." Josh accepted these amendments with serene seriousness. "And Miss Severence isn't fit for the job. She has some brains—the woman kind of brains. She has a great deal of rudimentary character. If I had the time, and it were worth while, I could develop her into a real woman. But I haven't, and it wouldn't be worth while when there are so many real women, ready made, out where I come from. This girl would be exactly the wife for you,

though. Just as she is, she'd help you mince about from parlor to parlor, and smirk and jabber and waste time. She's been educating for the job ever since she was born." He laid his hand in gracious, kindly fashion on his friend's shoulder. "Think it over. And if you want my help it's yours. I can show her what a fine fellow you are, what a good husband you'd make. For you are a fine person, old man; when you were born fashionable and rich it spoiled a—"

"A superb pram-trundler," suggested Arkwright.

"Precisely. Be off now; I must work. Be off, and exhibit that wonderful suit and those spotless white spats where they'll be appreciated." And he dismissed the elegantly-dressed idler as a king might rid himself of a favorite who threatened to presume upon his master's good humor and outstay his welcome. But Arkwright didn't greatly mind. He was used to Josh's airs. Also, though he would not have confessed it to his inmost self, Josh's preposterous assumptions, by sheer force of frequent and energetic reiteration, had made upon him an impression of possible validity—not probable, but possible; and the possible was quite enough to stir deep down in Arkwright's soul the all but universal deference before power. It never occurred to him to suspect there might be design in Craig's sweeping assertions and assumptions of superiority, that he might be shrewdly calculating that, underneath the ridicule those obstreperous vanities would create, there would gradually form and steadily grow a conviction of solid truth, a conviction that Joshua Craig was indeed the personage he professed to be—mighty, inevitably prevailing, Napoleonic.

This latent feeling of Arkwright's was, however, not strong enough to suppress his irritation when, a few days later, he went to the Severences for tea, and found Margaret and Josh alone in the garden, walking up and down, engaged in a conversation that was obviously intimate and absorbing. When he appeared on the veranda Joshua greeted him with an eloquent smile of loving friendship.

"Ah, there you are now!" he cried. "Well, little ones, I'll leave you together. I've wasted as much time as I can spare to-day to frivolity."

"Yes, hurry back to work," said Arkwright. "The ship of state's wobbling badly through your neglect."

Craig laughed, looking at Margaret. "Grant thinks that's a jest," said he. "Instead, it's the sober truth. I am engaged in keeping my Chief in order, and in preventing the President from skulking from the policies he has the shrewdness to advocate but lacks the nerve to put into action."

Margaret stood looking after him as he strode away.

"You mustn't mind his insane vanity," said Arkwright, vaguely uneasy at the expression of her hazel eyes, at once so dark, mysterious, melancholy, so light and frank and amused.

"I don't," said she in a tone that seemed to mean a great deal.

He, still more uneasy, went on: "A little more experience of the world and Josh'll come round all right—get a sense of proportion."

"But isn't it true?" asked Margaret somewhat absently.

"What?"

"Why, what he said as he was leaving. Before you came he'd been here quite a while, and most of the time he talked of himself—"

Arkwright laughed, but Margaret only smiled, and that rather reluctantly.

"And he was telling how hard a time he was having; what with Stillwater's corruption and the President's timidity about really acting against rich, people—something about criminal suits against what he calls the big thieves—I didn't understand it, or care much about it, but it gave me an impression of Mr. Craig's power."

"There IS some truth in what he says," Arkwright admitted, with a reluctance of which his pride, and his heart as well, were ashamed. "He's become a burr, a thorn, in the Administration, and they're really afraid of him in a way—though, of course, they have to laugh at him as every one else does."

"Of course," said Margaret absently.

Arkwright watched her nervously. "You seem to be getting round to the state of mind," said he, "where you'll be in danger of marrying our friend Craig."

Margaret, her eyes carefully away from him, laughed softly—a disturbingly noncommittal laugh.

"Of course, I'm only joking," continued Arkwright. "I know YOU couldn't marry HIM."

"Why not?"

"Because you don't think he's sincere."

Her silence made him feel that she thought this as weak as he did.

"Because you don't love him."

"No, I certainly don't love him," said Margaret.

"Because you don't even like him."

"What a strange way of advocating your friend you have."

Arkwright flushed scarlet. "I thought you'd quite dismissed him as a possibility," he stammered.

"With a woman every man's a possibility so long as no man's a certainty."

"Margaret, you couldn't marry a man you didn't like?"

She seemed to reflect. "Not if I were in love with another at the time," she said finally. "That's as far as my womanly delicacy—what's left of it after my years in society—can influence me. And it's stronger, I believe, than the delicacy of most women of our sort."

They were sitting now on the bench round the circle where the fountain was tossing high its jets in play with the sunshine. She was looking very much the woman of the fashionable world, and the soft grays, shading into blues, that dominated her costume gave her an exceeding and entrancing seeming of fragility. Arkwright thought her eyes wonderful; the sweet, powerful yet delicate odor of the lilac sachet powder with which her every garment was saturated set upon his senses like a love-philter.

"Yes, you are finer and nobler than most women," he said giddily. "And that's why it distresses me to hear you talk even in jest, as if you could marry Josh."

"And a few weeks ago you were suggesting him as just the husband for me."

Arkwright was silent. How could he go on? How tell her why he had changed without committing himself to her by a proposal? She was fascinating—would be an ideal wife. With what style and taste she'd entertain—how she'd shine at the head of his table! What a satisfaction it would be to feel that his money was being so competently spent. But—well, he did not wish to marry, not just yet; perhaps, somewhere in the world, he would find, in the next few years, a woman even better suited to him than Margaret. Marrying was a serious business. True, now that divorce had pushed its way up and had become recognized by fashionable society, had become an established social favorite, marriage had been robbed of one of its terrors. But the other remained—divorce still meant alimony. The woman who trapped an eligible never endangered her hard-earned position; a man must be extremely careful or he would find himself forced to hard choice between keeping on with a woman he wished to be rid of and paying out a large part of his income in alimony. It seemed far-fetched to think of these things in connection with such a woman as Margaret. He certainly never could grow tired of her, and her looks were of the sort that had staying power. Nor was she in the least likely to be so ungrateful as to wish to be rid of him and hold him up for alimony. Still—wouldn't it have been seemingly just as absurd to consider in advance such sordid matters in connection with any one of a dozen couples among his friends whose matrimonial enterprises had gone smash? It was said that nowadays girls went to the altar thinking that if the husbands they were taking proved unsatisfactory they would soon be free again, the better off by the title of Mrs. and a good stiff alimony and some invaluable experience. "I must keep my head," thought he. "I must consider how I'd feel after the fatal cards were out."

"Yes, you were quite eager for me to marry him," persisted she. She was watching his face out of the corner of her eye.

"I admit it," said he huskily. "But we've both changed since then."

"Changed?" said she, perhaps a shade too encouragingly.

He felt the hook tickling his gills and darted off warily. "Changed toward him, I mean. Changed in our estimate of his availability as a husband for you." He rose; the situation was becoming highly perilous. "I must speak to your mother and fly. I'm late for an appointment now."

As he drove away ten minutes later he drew a long breath. "Gad!" said he half aloud, "Rita'll never realize how close I was to proposing to-day. She ALMOST had me.... Though why I should think of it that way I don't know. It's damned low and indelicate of me. She ought to be my wife. I love her as much as a man of experience can love a woman in advance of trying her out thoroughly. If she had money I'd not be hesitating, I'm afraid. Then, too, I don't think the moral tone of that set she and I travel with is what it ought to be. It's all very well for me, but—Well, a man ought to be ready for almost anything that might happen if his wife went with that crowd—or had gone with it before he married her. Not that I suspect Margaret, though I must say—What a pup this sort of life does make of a man in some ways!... Yes, I almost leaped. She'll never know how near I came to it.... Perhaps Josh's more than half-right and I'm oversophisticated. My doubts and delays may cost me a kind of happiness I'd rather have than anything on earth—IF it really exists." There he laughed comfortably. "Poor Rita! If she only knew, how cut up she'd be!"

He might not have been so absolutely certain of her ignorance could he have looked into the Severances' drawing-room just then. For Margaret, after a burst of hysterical gayety, had gone to the far end of the room on the pretext of arranging some flowers. And there, with her face securely hid from the half-dozen round the distant tea-table, she was choking back the sobs, was muttering: "I'll have to do it! I'm a desperate woman—desperate!"

CHAPTER VI

MR. CRAIG IN SWEET DANGER

It is a rash enterprise to open wide to the world the private doors of the family, to expose intimate interiors all unconscious of outside observation, and all unprepared for it. Such frankness tends to destroy "sympathetic interest," to make delusion and illusion impossible; it gives cynicism and his brother, pharisaism, their opportunity to simper and to sneer. Still rasher is it to fling wide the doors of a human heart, and, without any clever arrangement

of lights and shades, reveal in the full face of the sun exactly what goes on there. We lie to others unconsciously; we lie to ourselves both consciously and unconsciously. We admit and entertain dark thoughts, and at the first alarm of exposure deny that we ever saw them before; we cover up our motives, forget where we have hidden them, and wax justly indignant when they are dug out and confronted with us. We are scandalized, quite honestly, when others are caught doing what we ourselves have done. We are horrified and cry "Monster!" when others do what we ourselves refrain from doing only through lack of the bad courage.

No man is a hero who is not a hero to his valet; and no woman a lady unless her maid thinks so. Margaret Severence's new maid Selina was engaged to be married; the lover had gone on a spree, had started a free fight in the streets, and had got himself into jail for a fortnight. It was the first week of his imprisonment, and Selina had committed a series of faults intolerable in a maid. She sent Margaret to a ball with a long tear in her skirt; she let her go out, open in the back, both in blouse and in placket; she upset a cup of hot CAFÉ AU LAIT on her arm; finally she tore a strap off a shoe as she was fastening it on Margaret's foot. Though no one has been able to fathom it, there must be a reason for the perversity whereby our outbursts of anger against any seriously-offending fellow-being always break on some trivial offense, never on one of the real and deep causes of wrath. Margaret, though ignorant of her maid's secret grief and shame, had borne patiently the sins of omission and commission, only a few of which are catalogued above; this, though the maid, absorbed in her woe, had not even apologized for a single one of them. On the seventh day of discomforts and disasters Margaret lost her temper at the triviality of the ripping off of the shoe-strap, and poured out upon Selina not only all her resentment against her but also all that she had been storing up since the beginning of the season against life and destiny. Selina sat on the floor stupefied; Margaret, a very incarnation of fury, raged up and down the room, venting every and any insult a naturally caustic wit suggested. "And," she wound up, "I want you to clear out at once. I'll send you your month's wages. I can't give you a character—except for honesty. I'll admit, you are too stupid to steal. Clear out, and never let me see you again."

She swept from the room, drove away to lunch at Mrs. Baker's. She acted much as usual, seemed to be enjoying herself, for the luncheon was very good indeed, Mrs. Baker's chef being new from France and not yet grown careless, and the company was amusing. At the third course she rose. "I've forgotten something," said she. "I must go at once. No, no one must be disturbed on my account. I'll drive straight home." And she was gone before Mrs. Baker could rise from her chair.

At home Margaret went up to her own room, through her bedroom to Selina's—almost as large and quite as comfortable as her own and hardly plainer. She knocked. As there was no answer, she opened the door. On the bed, sobbing heart-brokenly, lay Selina, crushed by the hideous injustice of being condemned capitally merely for tearing off a bit of leather which the shoemaker had neglected to make secure.

"Selina," said Margaret.

The maid turned her big, homely, swollen face on the pillow, ceased sobbing, gasped in astonishment.

"I've come to beg your pardon," said Margaret, not as superior to inferior, nor yet with the much-vaunted "just as if they were equals," but simply as one human being to another. The maid sat up. One of her braids had come undone and was hanging ludicrously down across her cheek.

"I insulted you, and I'm horribly ashamed." Wistfully: "Will you forgive me?"

"Oh, law!" cried the maid despairingly, "I'm dreaming." And she threw herself down once more and sobbed afresh.

Margaret knelt beside the bed, put her hand appealingly on the girl's shoulder. "Can you forgive me, Selina?" said she. "There's no excuse for me except that I've had so much hard luck, and everything seems to be going to pieces under me."

Selina stopped sobbing. "I told a story when I came to you and said I'd had three years' experience," moaned she, not to be outdone in honorable generosity. "It was only three months as lady's maid, and not much of a lady, neither."

"I don't in the least care," Margaret assured her. "I'm not strictly truthful myself at times, and I do all sorts of horrid things."

"But that's natural in a lady," objected Selina, "where there ain't no excuse for me that have only my character."

Margaret was careful not to let Selina see her smile in appreciation of this unconsciously profound observation upon life and morals. "Never mind," said she; "you're going to be a good maid soon. You're learning quickly."

"No, no," wailed Selina. "I'm a regular block-head, and my hands is too coarse."

"But you have a good heart and I like you," said Margaret. "And I want you to forgive me and like me. I'm so lonely and unhappy. And I need the love of one so close to me all the time as you are. It'd be a real help."

Selina began to cry again, and then Margaret gave way to tears; and, presently, out came the dreadful story of the lover's fight and jailing; and Margaret, of course, promised to see that he was released at once. When she went to her own room, the maid following to help her efface the very disfiguring evidence of their humble, emotional drama, Margaret had recovered her self-esteem and had won a friend, who, if too stupid to be very useful, was also too stupid to be unfaithful.

As it was on the same day, and scarcely one brief hour later, it must have been the very same Margaret who paced the alley of trimmed elms, her eyes so stern and somber, her mouth and chin so hard that her worshipful sister Lucia watched in silent, fascinated dread. At length Margaret noted Lucia, halted and: "Why don't you read your book?" she cried fiercely. "Why do you sit staring at me?"

"What a temper you have got—what a NASTY temper!" Lucia was goaded into retorting.

"Haven't I, though!" exclaimed Margaret, as if she gloried in it. "Stop that staring!"

"I could see you were thinking something—something—TERRIBLE!" explained Lucia.

Margaret's face cleared before a satirical smile. "What a romancer you are, Lucia." Then, with a laugh: "I'm taking myself ridiculously seriously to-day. Temper—giving way to temper—is a sure sign of defective intelligence or of defective digestion."

"Is it about—about Mr. Craig?"

Margaret reddened, dropped to the bench near her sister—evidence that she was willing to talk, to confide—so far as she ever confided her inmost self—to the one person she could trust.

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

"No; not yet."

"But he's going to?"

Margaret gave a queer smile. "He doesn't think so."

"He wouldn't dare!" exclaimed Lucia. "Why, he's not in the same class with you."

"So! The little romancer is not so romantic that she forgets her snobbishness."

"I mean, he's so rude and noisy. I DETEST him!"

"So do I—at times."

Lucia looked greatly relieved. "I thought you were encouraging him. It seemed sort of—of—cheap, unworthy of you, to care to flirt with a man like that."

Margaret's expression became strange indeed. "I am not flirting with him," she said gravely. "I'm going to marry him."

Lucia was too amazed to speak, was so profoundly shocked that her usually rosy cheeks grew almost pale.

"Yes, I shall marry him," repeated Margaret slowly.

"But you don't love him!" cried Lucia.

"I dislike him," replied Margaret. After a pause she added: "When a woman makes up her mind to marry a man, willy-nilly, she begins to hate him. It's a case of hunter and hunted. Perhaps, after she's got him, she may change. But not till the trap springs—not till the game's bagged."

Lucia shuddered. "Oh, Rita!" she cried. And she turned away to bury her face in her arms.

"I suppose I oughtn't to tell you these things," pursued Margaret; "I ought to leave you your illusions as long as possible. But—why shouldn't you know the truth? Perhaps, if we all faced the truth about things, instead of sheltering ourselves in lies, the world would begin to improve."

"But I don't see why you chose him," persisted Lucia.

"I didn't. Fate did the choosing."

"But why not somebody like—like Grant Arkwright? Rita, I'm sure he's fond of you."

"So am I," said Rita. "But he's got the idea he would be doing me a favor in marrying me; and when a man gets that notion it's fatal. Also—He doesn't realize it himself, but I'm not prim enough to suit him. He imagines he's liberal—that's a common failing among men. But a woman who is natural shocks them, and they are taken in and pleased by one who poses as more innocent and impossible than any human being not perfectly imbecile could remain in a world that conceals nothing.... I despise Grant—I like him, but despise him."

"He IS small," admitted Lucia.

"Small? He's infinitesimal. He'd be mean with his wife about money. He'd run the house himself. He should have been a butler."

"But, at least, he's a gentleman."

"Oh, yes," said Margaret. "Yes, I suppose so. I despise him, while, in a way, I respect Craig."

"He has such a tough-looking skin," said Lucia.

"I don't mind that in a man," replied Margaret.

"His hands are like—like a coachman's," said Lucia. "Whenever I look at them I think of Thomas."

"No, they're more like the parrot's—they're claws.... That's why I'm marrying him."

"Because he has ugly hands?"

"Because they're ugly in just that way. They're the hands of the man who gets things and holds on to things. I'm taking him because he can get for me what I need." Margaret patted her sister on the shoulder. "Cheer up, Lucia! I'm lucky, I tell you. I'm getting, merely at the price of a little lying and a little shuddering, what most people can't get at any price."

"But he hasn't any money," objected Lucia.

"If he had, no doubt you'd find him quite tolerable. Even you—a young innocent."

"It does make a difference," admitted Lucia. "You see, people have to have money or they can't live like gentlemen and ladies."

"That's it," laughed Margaret. "What's a little thing like self-respect beside ease and comfort and luxury? As grandmother said, a lady who'd put anything before luxury has lost her self-respect."

"Everybody that's nice ought to have money," declared Lucia. "Then the world would be beautiful, full of love and romance, with everybody clean and well-dressed and never in a hurry."

But Margaret seemed not to hear. She was gazing at the fountain, her unseeing eyes gloomily reflecting her thoughts.

"If Mr. Craig hasn't got money why marry him?" asked her sister.

"He can get it," replied Margaret tersely. "He's the man to trample and crowd and clutch, and make everybody so uncomfortable that they'll gladly give him what he's snatching for." She laughed mockingly. "Yes, I shall get what I want"—then soberly—"if I can get him."

"Get HIM! Why, he'll be delighted! And he ought to be."

"No, he oughtn't to be; but he will be."

"A man like him—marrying a lady! And marrying YOU!" Lucia threw her arms round her sister's neck and dissolved in tears. "Oh, Rita, Rita!" she sobbed. "You are the dearest, loveliest girl on earth. I'm sure you're not doing it for yourself, at all. I'm sure you're doing it for my sake."

"You're quite wrong," said Rita, who was sitting unmoved and was looking like her grandmother. "I'm doing it for myself. I'm fond, of luxury—of fine dresses and servants and all that.... Think of the thousands, millions of women who marry just for a home and a bare living!... No doubt, there's something wrong about the whole thing, but I don't see just what. If woman is made to lead a sheltered life, to be supported by a man, to be a man's plaything, why, she can't often get the man she'd most like to be the plaything of, can she?"

"Isn't there any such thing as love?" Lucia ventured wistfully. "Marrying for love, I mean."

"Not among OUR sort of people, except by accident," Margaret assured her. "The money's the main thing. We don't say so. We try not to think so. We denounce as low and coarse anybody that does say so. But it's the truth, just the same.... Those who marry for money regret it, but not so much as those who marry only for love—when poverty begins to pinch and to drag everything fine and beautiful down into the mud. Besides, I don't love anybody—thank God! If I did, Lucia, I'm afraid I'd not have the courage!"

"I'm sure you couldn't!" cried Lucia, eager to save all possible illusion about her sister. Then, remorseful for disloyal thoughts: "And, if it wasn't right, I'm sure you'd not do it. You MAY fall in love with him afterward."

"Yes," assented Margaret, kissing Lucia on an impulse of gratitude. "Yes, I may. I probably shall. Surely, I'm not to go through life never doing anything I ought to do."

"He's really handsome, in that bold, common way. And you can teach him."

Margaret laughed with genuine mirth. "How surprised he'd be," she exclaimed, "if he could know what's going on in my head!"

"He'll be on his knees to you," pursued Lucia, wonderfully cheered up by her confidence in the miracles Margaret's teaching would work. "And he'll do whatever you say."

"Yes, I'll teach him," said Margaret, herself more hopeful; for must always improves with acquaintance. "I'll make him over completely. Oh, he's not so bad as they think—not by any means."

Lucia made an exaggerated gesture of shivering.

"He gets on my nerves," said she. "He's so horribly abrupt and ill-mannered."

"Yes, I'll train him," said Margaret, musing aloud. "He doesn't especially fret my nerves. A woman gets a good, strong nervous system—and a good, strong stomach—after she has been out a few years." She laughed. "And he thinks I'm as fine and delicate as—as—"

"As you look," suggested Lucia.

"As I look," accepted Margaret. "How we do deceive men by our looks! Really, Lucia, HE'S far more sensitive than I—far more."

"That's too silly!"

"If I were a millionth part as coarse as he is he'd fly from me. Yet I'm not flying from him."

This was unanswerable. Lucia rejoined: "When are you going to—to do it?"

"Right away.... I want to get it over with. I can't stand the suspense.... I can't stand it!" And Lucia was awed and silenced by the sudden, strained look of anguish almost that made Margaret's face haggard and her eyes wild.

CHAPTER VII

MRS. SEVERENCE IS ROUSED

Craig swooped upon the Severences the next afternoon. His arrivals were always swoopings—a swift descent on a day when he was not expected; or, if the day was forearranged, then the hour would be a surprise. It was a habit with him, a habit deliberately formed. He liked to take people unawares, to create a flurry, reasoning that he, quick of eye and determined of purpose, could not but profit by any confusion. He was always in a hurry—that is, he seemed to be. In this also there was deliberation. It does not follow because a man is in a hurry that he is an important and busy person; no more does it follow that a man is an inconsequential procrastinator if he is leisurely and dilatory. The significance of action lies in intent. Some men can best gain their ends by creating an impression that they are extremely lazy, others by creating the impression that they are exceedingly energetic. The important point is to be on the spot at the moment most favorable for gaining the desired advantage; and it will be found that of the men who get what they want in this world, both those who seem to hasten and those who seem to lounge are always at the right place at the right time.

It best fitted Craig, by nature impatient, noisily aggressive, to adopt the policy of rush. He arrived before time usually, fumed until he had got everybody into that nervous state in which men, and women, too, will yield more than they ever would in the kindly, melting mood. Though he might stay hours, he, each moment, gave the impression that everybody must speak quickly or he would be gone, might quickly be rid of him by speaking quickly. Obviously, intercourse with him was socially unsatisfactory; but this did not trouble him, as his theory of life was, get what you want, never mind the way or the feelings of others. And as he got by giving, attached his friends by self-interest, made people do for him what it was just as well that they should do, the net result, after the confusion and irritation had calmed, was that everybody felt, on the whole, well content with having been compelled. It was said of him that he made even his enemies work for him; and this was undoubtedly true—in the sense in which it was meant as well as in the deeper sense that a man's enemies, if he be strong, are his most assiduous allies and advocates. It was also true that he did a great deal for people. Where most men do favors only when the prospect of return is immediate, he busied himself as energetically if returns seemed remote, even improbable, as he did when his right hand was taking in with interest as his left hand gave. It was his nature to be generous, to like to give; it was also his nature to see that a reputation for real generosity and kindness of heart was an invaluable asset, and that the only way to win such a reputation was by deserving it.

Craig arrived at the Severences at half-past four, when no one was expected until five. "Margaret is dressing," explained Mrs. Severence, as she entered the drawing-room. "She'll be down presently—if you care to wait." This, partly because she hoped he would go, chiefly because he seemed in such a hurry.

"I'll wait a few minutes," said Craig in his sharp, irritating voice.

And he began to tour the room, glancing at pictures, at articles on the tables, mussing the lighter pieces of furniture about. Mrs. Severence, pink-and-white, middle-aged, fattish and obviously futile, watched him with increasing nervousness. He would surely break something; or, being by a window when the impulse to depart seized him, would leap through, taking sash, curtains and all with him.

"Perhaps we'd better go outdoors," suggested she. She felt very helpless, as usual. It was from her that Lucia inherited her laziness and her taste for that most indolent of all the dissipations, the reading of love stories.

"Outdoors?" exploded Craig, wheeling on her, as if he had previously been unconscious of her presence. "No. We'll sit here. I want to talk to you."

And he plumped himself into a chair near by, his claw-like hands upon his knees, his keen eyes and beak-like nose bent toward her. Mrs. Severence visibly shrank. She felt as if that handsome, predatory face were pressed against the very window of her inmost soul.

"You wish to talk to me," she echoed, with a feeble conciliatory smile.

"About your daughter," said Craig, still more curt and aggressive. "Mrs. Severence, your daughter ought to get married."

Roxana Severence was so amazed that her mouth dropped open. "Married?" she echoed, as if her ears had deceived her.

The colossal impudence of it! This young man, this extremely common young man, daring to talk to her about such a private matter! And she had not yet known him a month; and only within the last fortnight had he been making frequent visits—entirely on his own invitation, for she certainly would not overtly provoke such a visitation as his coming meant. Mrs. Severence would have been angry had she dared. But Craig's manner was most alarming; what would—what would not a person so indifferent to the decencies of life do if he were crossed?

"She must get married," pursued Craig firmly. "Do you know why I've been coming here these past two or three weeks?"

Mrs. Severence was astounded anew. The man was actually about to propose for her daughter! This common man, with nothing!

"It's not my habit to make purposeless visits," continued he, "especially among frivolous, idle people like you. I've been coming here to make a study of your daughter."

He paused. Mrs. Severence gave a feeble, frightened smile, made a sound that might have been mirth and again might have been the beginnings of a hastily-suppressed call for help.

"And," Craig went on energetically, "I find that she is a very superior sort of person. In another environment she

might have been a big, strong woman. She's amazing, considering the sickly, sycophantic atmosphere she's been brought up in. Now, I want to see her married. She's thoroughly discontented and unhappy. She's becoming sour and cynical. WE must get her married. It's your duty to rouse yourself."

Mrs. Severence did rouse herself just at this moment. Cheeks aflame and voice trembling, she stood and said:

"You are very kind, Mr. Craig, to offer to assist me in bringing up my family. Surely—such—such interest is unusual on brief and very slight acquaintance." She rang the bell. "I can show my appreciation in only one way." The old butler, Williams, appeared. "Williams, show this gentlemen out." And she left the room.

Williams, all frigid dignity and politeness, stood at the large entrance doors, significantly holding aside one curtain. Craig rose, his face red. "Mrs. Severence isn't very well," said he noisily to the servant, as if he were on terms of closest intimacy with the family. "Tell Margaret I'll wait for her in the garden." And he rushed out by the window that opened on the veranda, leaving the amazed butler at the door, uncertain what to do.

Mrs. Severence, ascending the stairs in high good humor with herself at having handled a sudden and difficult situation as well as she had ever read of its being handled in a novel, met her daughter descending.

"Sh-h!" said she in a whisper, for she had not heard the front door close. "He may not be gone. Come with me."

Margaret followed her mother into the library at the head of the stairs.

"It was that Craig man," explained Mrs. Severence, when she had the door closed. "What DO you think he had the impudence to do?"

"I'm sure I can't imagine," said Margaret, impatient.

"He proposed for you!"

Margaret reflected a brief instant. "Nonsense!" she said decisively. "He's not that kind. You misunderstood him."

"I tell you he did!" cried her mother. "And I ordered him out of the house."

"What?" screamed Margaret, clutching her mother's arm. "WHAT?"

"I ordered him out of the house," stammered her mother.

"I wish you'd stick to your novels and let me attend to my own affairs," cried Margaret, pale with fury. "Is he gone?"

"I left Williams attending to it. Surely, Rita—"

But Margaret had flung the door open and was darting down the stairs. "Where is he?" she demanded fiercely of Williams, still in the drawing-room doorway.

"In the garden, ma'am," said Williams. "He didn't pay no attention."

But Margaret was rushing through the drawing-room. At the French windows she caught sight of him, walking up and down in his usual quick, alert manner, now smelling flowers, now staring up into the trees, now scrutinizing the upper windows of the house. She drew back, waited until she had got her breath and had composed her features. Then, with the long skirts of her graceful pale-blue dress trailing behind her, and a big white sunshade open and resting upon her shoulder, she went down the veranda steps and across the lawn toward him. He paused, gazed at her in frank—vulgarly frank—admiration; just then, it seemed to her, he never said or did or looked anything except in the vulgarest way.

"You certainly are a costly-looking luxury," said he loudly, when there were still a dozen yards between them. "Oh, there's your mother at the window, upstairs—her bedroom window."

"How did you know it was her bedroom?" asked Margaret.

"While I was waiting for you to come down one day I sent for one of the servants and had him explain the lay of the house."

"Really!" said Margaret, satirical and amused. "I suppose there was no mail on the table or you'd have read that while you waited?"

"There you go, trying to say clever, insulting things. Why not be frank? Why not be direct?"

"Why should I, simply because YOU wish it? You don't half realize how amusing you are."

"Oh, yes, I do," retorted he, with a shrewd, quick glance from those all-seeing eyes of his.

"Half, I said. You do half realize. I told you once before that I knew what a fraud you were."

"I play my game in my own way," evaded he; "and it seems to be doing nicely, thank you."

"But the further you go, the harder it'll be for you to progress."

"Then the harder for those opposing me. I don't make it easy for those who are making it hard for me. I get 'em so busy nursing their own wounds that they've no longer time to bother me. I've told you before, and I tell you again, I shall go where I please."

"Let me see," laughed Margaret; "it was Napoleon—wasn't it?—who used to talk that way?"

"And you think I'm imitating him, eh?"

"You do suggest it very often."

"I despise him. A wicked, little, dago charlatan who was put out of business as soon as he was really opposed. No!—no Waterloo for me!... How's your mother? She got sick while I was talking to her and had to leave the room."

"Yes, I know," said Margaret.

"You ought to make her take more exercise. Don't let her set foot in a carriage. We are animals, and nature has provided that animals shall walk to keep in health. Walking and things like that are the only sane modes of getting about. Everything aristocratic is silly. As soon as we begin to rear and strut we stumble into our graves—But it's no use to talk to you about that. I came on another matter."

Margaret's lips tightened; she hastily veiled her eyes.

"I've taken a great fancy to you," Craig went on. "That's why I've wasted so much time on you. What you need is a husband—a good husband. Am I not right?"

Margaret, pale, said faintly: "Go on."

"You know I'm right. Every man and every woman ought to marry. A home—children—THAT'S life. The rest is all incidental—trivial. Do you suppose I could work as I do if it wasn't that I'm getting ready to be a family man? I need love—sympathy—tenderness. People think I'm hard and ambitious. But they don't know. I've got a heart, overflowing with tenderness, as some woman'll find out some day. But I didn't come to talk about myself."

Margaret made a movement of surprise—involuntary, startled.

"No, I don't always talk about myself," Craig went on; "and I'll let you into a secret. I don't THINK about myself nearly so much as many of these chaps who never speak of themselves. However, as I was saying, I'm going to get you a husband. Now, don't you get sick, as your mother did. Be sensible. Trust me. I'll see you through—and that's more than any of these cheap, shallow people round you would do."

"Well?" said Margaret.

"You and Grant Arkwright are going to marry. Now don't pretend—don't protest. It's the proper thing and it must be done. You like him?"

As Craig was looking sharply at her she felt she must answer. She made a vague gesture of assent.

"Of course!" said Craig. "If you and he led a natural life you'd have been married long ago. Now, I'm going to dine with him to-night. I'll lay the case before him. He'll be out here after you to-morrow."

Margaret trembled with anger. Two bright spots burned in her cheeks. "You wouldn't dare!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "No, not even you!"

"And why not?" demanded Craig calmly. "Do you suppose I'm going to stand idly by, and let two friends of mine, two people I'm as fond of as I am of you two creatures, make fools of yourselves? No. I shall bring you together."

Margaret rose. "If you say a word to Grant I'll never speak to you again. And I assure you I shouldn't marry HIM if he were the last man on earth."

"If you only knew men better!" exclaimed Craig earnestly. His eyes fascinated her, and his sharp, penetrating voice somehow seemed to reach to her very soul and seize it and hold it enthralled. "My dear child, Grant Arkwright is one man in a million. I've been with him in times that show men's qualities. Don't judge men by what they are ordinarily. They don't reveal their real selves. Wait till a crisis comes—then you see manhood or lack of it. Life is bearable, at the worst, for any of us in the routine. But when the crisis comes we need, not only all our own strength, but all we can rally to our support. I tell you, Miss Severence, Grant is one of the men that can be relied on. I despise his surface—as I do yours. But it's because I see the man—the manhood—beneath that surface, that I love him. And I want him to have a woman worthy of him. That means YOU. You, too, have the soul that makes a human being—a real aristocrat—of the aristocracy, of strong and honest hearts."

Craig's face was splendid, was ethereal in its beauty, yet flashing with manliness. He looked as she had seen him that night two years before, when he had held even her and her worldly friends spellbound, had made them thrill with ideas of nobility and human helpfulness foreign to their everyday selves. She sat silent when he had finished, presently drew a long breath.

"Why aren't you always like that?" she exclaimed half to herself.

"You'll marry Grant?"

She shook her head positively. "Impossible."

"Why not?"

"Impossible," she repeated. "And you mustn't speak of it to me—or to him. I appreciate your motive. I thank you—really, I do. It makes me feel better, somehow, to have had any one think so well of me as you do. And Grant ought to be proud of your friendship."

Their eyes met. She flushed to the line of her hair and her glance fell, for she felt utterly ashamed of herself for the design upon him which she had been harboring. "Let us go in and join the others," said she confusedly. And her color fled, returned in a flood.

"No, I'm off," replied he, in his ordinary, sharp, bustling way. "I'm not defeated. I've done well—very well, for a beginning." And he gave her hand his usual firm, uncomfortable clasp, and rushed away.

She walked up and down full fifteen minutes before she went toward the house. At the veranda Lucia intercepted her. "Did he?" she asked anxiously.

Margaret looked at her vaguely, then smiled. "No, he did not."

"He didn't?" exclaimed Lucia, at once disappointed and relieved.

"Not yet," said Margaret. She laughed, patted Lucia's full-blown cheek. "Not quite yet." And she went on in to tea, humming to herself gayly; she did not understand her own sudden exceeding high spirits.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. CRAIG CONFIDES

Craig did not leave Margaret more precipitately than he had intended; that would have been impossible, as he always strove to make his departures seem as startling and mysterious as a dematerialization. But he did leave much sooner than he had intended, and with only a small part of what he had planned to say said. He withdrew to think it over; and in the long walk from the Severences to his lodgings in the Wyandotte he did think it over with his usual exhaustive thoroughness.

He had been entirely sincere in his talk with Margaret. He was a shrewd judge both of human nature and of situations, and he saw that a marriage between Margaret and Grant would be in every way admirable. He appreciated the fine qualities of both, and realized that they would have an uncommonly good chance of hitting it off tranquilly together. Of all their qualities of mutual adaptability the one that impressed him most deeply was the one at which he was always scoffing—what he called their breeding. Theoretically, and so far as his personal practice went, he genuinely despised "breeding"; but he could not uproot a most worshipful reverence for it, a reverence of which he was ashamed. He had no "breeding" himself; he was experiencing in Washington a phase of life which was entirely new to him, and it had developed in him the snobbish instincts that are the rankest weeds in the garden of civilization. Their seeds fly everywhere, are sown broadcast, threaten the useful plants and the flowers incessantly, contrive to grow, to flourish even, in the desert places. Craig had an instinct against this plague; but he was far too self-confident to suspect that it could enter his own gates and attack his own fields. He did not dream that the chief reason why he thought Grant and Margaret so well suited to each other was the reason of snobbishness; that he was confusing their virtues with their vices; and was admiring them for qualities which were blighting their usefulness and even threatening to make sane happiness impossible for either. It was not their real refinement that he admired, and, at times, envied; it was their showy affectations of refinement, those gaudy pretenses that appeal to the crude human imagination, like uniforms and titles.

It had not occurred to him that Margaret might possibly be willing to become his wife. He would have denied it as fiercely to himself as to others, but at bottom he could not have thought of himself as at ease in any intimate relation with her. He found her beautiful physically, but much too fine and delicate to be comfortable with. He could be brave, bold, insolent with her, in an impersonal way; but personally he could not have ventured the slightest familiarity, now that he really appreciated "what a refined, delicate woman is."

But the easiest impression for a woman to create upon a man—or a man upon a woman—is the impression of being in love. We are so conscious of our own merits, we are so eager to have them appreciated, that we will exaggerate or misinterpret any word or look, especially from a person of the opposite sex, into a tribute to them. When Craig pleaded for Grant and Margaret, moved by his eloquent sincerity, dropped her eyes and colored in shame for her plans about him, in such black contrast with his frank generosity, he noted her change of expression, and instantly his vanity flashed into his mind: "Can it be that she loves me?"

The more he reflected upon it the clearer it became to him that she did. Yes, here was being repeated the old story of the attraction of extremes. "She isn't so refined that appreciation of real manhood has been refined out of her," thought he. "And why shouldn't she love me? What does all this nonsense of family and breeding amount to, anyway?" His mind was in great confusion. At one moment he was dismissing the idea of such delicateness, such super-refined super-sensitiveness being taken with a man of his imperfect bringing-up and humble origin. The next moment his self-esteem was bobbing again, was jauntily assuring him that he was "a born king" and, therefore, would naturally be discovered and loved by a truly princess—"And, by Heaven, she IS a princess of the blood royal! Those eyes, those hands, those slender feet!" Having no great sense of humor he did not remind himself here how malicious nature usually deprives royalty of the outward marks of aristocracy to bestow them upon peasant.

At last he convinced himself that she was actually burning with love for him, that she had lifted the veil for an instant—had lifted it deliberately to encourage him to speak for himself. And he was not repelled by this forwardness, was, on the contrary, immensely flattered. It is the custom for those of high station to reassure those of lower, to make them feel that they may draw near without fear. A queen seeking a consort among princes always begins the courting. A rich girl willing to marry a poor man lets him see she will not be offended if he offers to add himself to her possessions. Yes, it would be quite consistent with sex-custom, with maidenly modesty, for a Severence to make the first open move toward a Josh Craig.

"But do I want her?"

That was another question. He admired her, he would be proud to have such a wife. "She's just the sort I need, to

adorn the station I'm going to have." But what of his dreams of family life, of easy, domestic undress, which she would undoubtedly find coarse and vulgar? "It would be like being on parade all the time—she's been used to that sort of thing her whole life, but it'd make me miserable." Could he afford a complete, a lifelong sacrifice of comfort to gratify a vanity?

He had devoted much thought to the question of marriage. On the one hand he wanted money; for in politics, with the people so stupid and so fickle, a man without an independence, at least, would surely find himself, sooner or later, in a position where he must choose between retiring and submitting himself to some powerful interest—either a complete sale, or a mortgage hardly less galling to pride, no less degrading to self-respect. On the other hand he wanted a home—a wife like his mother, domestic, attentive, looking out for his comfort and his health, herself taking care of the children. And he had arrived at a compromise. He would marry a girl out West somewhere, a girl of some small town, brought up somewhat as he had been brought up, not shocked by what Margaret Severance would regard as his vulgarities—a woman with whom he felt equal and at ease. He would select such a woman, provided, in addition, with some fortune—several hundred thousands, at least, enough to make him independent. Such had been his plan. But now that he had seen Margaret, had come to appreciate her through studying her as a possible wife for his unattached friend Arkwright, now that he had discovered her secret, her love for him—how could he fit her into his career? Was it possible? Was it wise?

"The best is none too good for me," said he to himself swaggeringly. No doubt about it—no, indeed, not the slightest. But—well, everybody wouldn't realize this, as yet. And it must be admitted that those mere foppish, inane nothings did produce a seeming of difference. Indeed, it must even be admitted that the way Margaret had been brought up would make it hard for her, with her sensitive, delicate nerves, to bear with him if she really knew him. A hot wave passed over his body at the thought. "How ashamed I'd be to have her see my wardrobe. I really must brace up in the matter of shirts, and in the quality of underclothes and socks." No, she probably would be shocked into aversion if she really knew him—she, who had been surrounded by servants in livery all her life; who had always had a maid to dress her, to arrange a delicious bath for her every morning and every evening, to lay out, from a vast and thrilling store of delicate clothing, the fresh, clean, fine, amazingly costly garments that were to have the honor and the pleasure of draping that aristocratic body of hers. "Why, her maid," thought he, "is of about the same appearance and education as my aunts. Old Williams is a far more cultured person than my uncles or brothers-in-law." Of course, Selina and Williams were menials, while his male kin were men and his female relatives women, "and all of them miles ahead of anything in this gang when it comes to the real thing—character." Still, so far as appearances went—"I'm getting to be a damned, cheap snob!" cried he aloud. "To hell with the whole crowd! I want nothing to do with them!"

But Margaret, in her beautiful garments, diffusing perfume just as her look and manner diffused the aroma of gentle breeding—The image of her was most insidiously alluring; he could not banish it. "And, damn it all, isn't she just a human being? What's become of my common-sense that I treat these foolish trifles as if they were important?"

Grant Arkwright came while the debate was still on. He soon noted that something was at work in Josh's mind to make him so silent and glum, so different from his usual voluble, flamboyant self. "What's up, Josh? What deviltry are you plotting now to add to poor old Stillwater's nervous indigestion?"

"I'm thinking about marriage," said Craig, lighting a cigarette and dropping into the faded magnificence of an ex-salon chair.

"Good business!" exclaimed Arkwright.

"It's far more important that you get married than that I do," explained Craig. "At present you don't amount to a damn. You're like one of those twittering swallows out there. As a married man you'd at least have the validity that attaches to every husband and father."

"If I could find the right girl," said Grant.

"I thought I had found her for you," continued Craig. "But, on second thoughts, I've about decided to take her for myself."

"Oh, you have?" said Arkwright, trying to be facetious of look and tone.

"Yes," said Josh, in his abrupt, decisive way. He threw the cigarette into the empty fireplace and stood up. "I think I'll take your advice and marry Miss Severance."

"Really!" mocked Grant; but he was red with anger, was muttering under his breath, "Insolent puppy!"

"Yes, I think she'll do." Craig spoke as if his verdict were probably overpartial to her. "It's queer about families and the kind of children they have. Every once in a while you'll find a dumb ass of a man whose brain will get to boiling with liquor or some other ferment, and it'll incubate an idea, a real idea. It's that way about paternity—or, rather, maternity. Now who'd think that inane, silly mother of Margaret's could have brought such a person as she is into the world?"

"Mrs. Severence is a very sweet and amiable LADY," said Grant coldly.

"Pooh!" scoffed Craig. "She's a nothing—a puff of wind—a nit. Such as she, by the great gross, wouldn't count one."

"I doubt if it would be—wise—politically, I mean—for you to marry a woman of—of the fashionable set." Grant spoke judicially, with constraint in his voice.

"You're quite right there," answered Craig promptly. "Still, it's a temptation.... I've been reconsidering the idea since I discovered that she loves me."

Grant leaped to his feet. "Loves you!" he shouted. Josh smiled calmly. "Loves me," said he. "Why not, pray?"

"I—I—I—don't know," answered Grant weakly.

"Oh, yes, you do. You think I'm not good enough for her—as if this were not America, but Europe." And he went on loftily: "You ought to consider what such thoughts mean, as revelations of your own character, Grant."

"You misunderstood me entirely," protested Grant, red and guilty. "Didn't I originally suggest her to you?"

"But you didn't really mean it," retorted Craig with a laugh which Grant thought the quintessence of impertinence. "You never dreamed she'd fall in love with me."

"Josh," said Grant, "I wish you wouldn't say that sort of thing. It's not considered proper in this part of the country for a gentleman to speak out that way about women."

"What's there to be ashamed of in being in love? Besides, aren't you my best friend, the one I confide everything to?"

"You confide everything to everybody."

Craig looked amused. "There are only two that can keep a secret," said he, "nobody and everybody. I trust either the one or the other, and neither has ever betrayed me."

"To go back to the original subject: I'd prefer you didn't talk to me in that way about that particular young lady."

"Why?... Because you're in love with her, yourself?"

Grant silently stared at the floor.

"Poor old chap," said Craig sympathetically.

Arkwright winced, started to protest, decided it was just as well to let Craig think what he pleased at that juncture.

"Poor old chap!" repeated Josh. "Well, you needn't despair. It's true she isn't in love with you and is in love with me. But if I keep away from her and discourage her it'll soon die out. Women of that sort of bringing up aren't capable of any enduring emotion—unless they have outside aid in keeping it alive."

"No, thank you," said Arkwright bitterly. "I decline to be put in the position of victim of your generosity. Josh, let me tell you, your notion that she's in love with you is absurd. I'd advise you not to go round confiding it to people, in your usual fashion. You'll make yourself a laughing stock."

"I've told no one but you," protested Craig.

"Have you seen any one else since you got the idea?"

"No, I haven't," he admitted with a laugh. "Now that you've told me the state of your heart I'll not speak of her feeling for me. I give you my word of honor on that. I understand how a chap like you, full of false pride, would be irritated at having people know he'd married a woman who was once in love with some one else. For of course you'll marry her."

"I'm not sure of that. I haven't your sublime self-confidence, you know."

"Oh, I'll arrange it," replied Craig, full of enthusiasm. "In fact, I had already begun, this very afternoon, when she let me see that she loved me and, so, brought me up standing."

"Damn it, man, DON'T say that!" cried Grant, all afire. "I tell you it's crazy, conceited nonsense."

"All right, all right, old chap," soothed Josh.

And it frenzied Arkwright to see that he said this merely to spare the feelings of an unrequited lover, not at all because he had begun to doubt Margaret's love. "Come down to dinner and let's talk no more about it," said Grant, with a great effort restraining himself. "I tell you, Josh, you make it mighty hard sometimes for me to remember what I owe you."

Craig wheeled on him with eyes that flashed and pierced. "My young friend," said he, "you owe me nothing. And let me say to you, once for all, you are free to break with me at any instant—you or any other man. Whenever I find I'm beginning to look on a man as necessary to me I drop him—break with him. I am necessary to my friends, not they to me. I like you, but be careful how you get impertinent with me."

Craig eyed him fiercely and steadily until Arkwright's gaze dropped. Then he laughed friendly. "Come along, Grant," said he. "You're a good fellow, and I'll get you the girl." And he linked his arm in Arkwright's and took up another phase of himself as the topic of his monologue.

CHAPTER IX

SOMEWHAT CYCLONIC

Margaret, on the way home afoot from the White House, where she had been lunching with the President's niece, happened upon Craig standing with his hands behind his back before the statue of Jackson. He was gazing up at the fierce old face with an expression so animated that passers-by were smiling broadly. She thought he was wholly absorbed; but when she was about half-way across his range of vision he hailed her. "I say, Miss Severence!" he cried loudly.

She flushed with annoyance. But she halted, for she knew that if she did not he would only shout at her and make a scene.

"I'll walk with you," said he, joining her when he saw she had no intention of moving toward him.

"Don't let me draw you from your devotions," protested she. "I'm just taking a car, anyhow."

"Then I'll ride home with you and walk back. I want to talk with a woman—a sensible woman—not easy to find in this town."

Margaret was disliking him, his manner was so offensively familiar and patronizing—and her plans concerning him made her contemptuous of herself, and therefore resentful against him. "I'm greatly flattered," said she.

"No, you're not. But you ought to be. I suppose if you had met that old chap on the pedestal there when he was my age you'd have felt toward him much as you do toward me."

"And I suppose he'd have been just about as much affected by it as you are."

"Just about. It was a good idea, planting his statue there to warn the fellow that happens to be in the White House not to get too cultured. You know it was because the gang that was in got too refined and forgot whom this country belonged to that old Jackson was put in office. The same thing will happen again."

"And you'll be the person?" suggested Margaret with a smile of raillery.

"If I show I'm fit for the job," replied Craig soberly. It was the first time she had ever heard him admit a doubt about himself. "The question is," he went on, "have I got the strength of character and the courage?... What do you think?"

"I don't know anything about it," said Margaret with polite indifference. "There comes my car. I'll not trouble you to accompany me." She put out her hand. "Goodby." She did not realize it, or intend it, but she had appealed to one of his powerful instincts, a powerful instinct in all predatory natures—the instinct to pursue whatever seems to be flying.

He shook his head at the motorman, who was bringing the car to a halt; the car went on. He stood in front of her. Her color was high, but she could not resist the steady compulsion of his eyes. "I told you I wanted to talk with you," said he. "Do you know why I was standing before that statue?"

"I do not," Margaret answered coldly.

"I was trying to get the courage to ask you to be my wife."

She gave a queer laugh. "Well, you seem to have got what you sought," said she. He had, as usual, taken her wholly unawares.

"Not so fast," replied Craig. "I haven't asked you yet."

Margaret did not know whether she most wished to laugh or to burst out in anger. "I'm sure I don't care anything about it, one way or the other," said she.

"Why say those insincere things—to ME?" he urged. She had begun to walk, and he was keeping pace with her. "Jackson," he proceeded, "was a man of absolute courage. He took the woman he wanted—defied public opinion to do it—and it only made him the more popular. I had always intended to strengthen myself by marrying. If I married you I'd weaken myself politically, while if I married some Western girl, some daughter of the people, I'd make a great popular stroke."

"Well—do it, then," said Margaret. "By all means do it."

"Oh, but there's you," exclaimed Craig. "What'd I do about you?"

"That's true," said Margaret mockingly. "But what am I to stand between a man and ambition?"

"I say that to myself," replied Craig. "But it's no use." His eyes thrilled her, his voice seemed to melt her dislike, her resolve, as he said: "There you are, and there you stay, Margaret. And you're not at all fit to be my wife. You haven't been brought up right. You ought to marry some man like Grant. He's just the man for you. Why did you ever fall in love with me?"

She stopped short, stared at him in sheer amazement. "I!" exclaimed she. "I—in love with YOU!"

He halted before her. "Margaret," he said tenderly, "can you deny it?"

She flushed; hung her head. The indignant denial died upon her lips.

He sighed. "You see, it is fate," said he. "But I'll manage it somehow. I'll win out in spite of any, of every handicap."

She eyed him furtively. Yes, if she wished to make a marriage of ambition she could not do better. All Washington was laughing at him; but she felt she had penetrated beneath the surface that excited their mirth—had seen qualities that would carry him wherever he wished to go—wherever she, with her grandmother's own will, wished him to go.

"And," pursued he, "I'm far too rough and coarse for you—you, the quintessence of aristocracy."

She flushed with double delight—delight at this flattery and the deeper delight a woman feels when a man shows her the weakness in himself by which she can reach and rule him.

"I'm always afraid of offending your delicacy," he went fatuously on. "You're the only person I ever felt that way about. Absolutely the only one. But you've got to expect that sort of thing in a man who prevails in such a world as this. When men get too high-toned and aristocratic, too fussy about manners and dress, along come real men to ride them down and under. But I'll try to be everything you wish—to you. Not to the others. That would defeat our object; for I'm going to take my wife high—very high."

Yes, he would indeed take her high—very high. Now that what she wanted, what she must have, was offering, how could she refuse? They were crossing another square of green. He drew—almost dragged—her into one of the by-paths, seized her in his arms, kissed her passionately. "I can't resist you—I can't!" he cried.

"Don't—don't!" she murmured, violently agitated. "Some one might see!"

"Some one is seeing, no doubt," he said, his breath coming quickly, a look that was primeval, ferocious almost, in his eyes as they devoured her. And, despite her protests and struggles, she was again in those savage arms of his, was again shrinking and burning and trembling under his caresses. She flung herself away, sank upon a bench, burst out crying.

"What is it, Margaret?" he begged, alarmed, yet still looking as if he would seize her again.

"I don't know—I don't know," she replied.

Once more she tried to tell him that she did not love him, but the words would not come. She felt that he would not believe her; indeed, she was not sure of her own heart, of the meaning of those unprecedented emotions that had risen under his caresses, and that stirred at the memory of them. "Perhaps I am trying to love him," she said to herself. "Anyhow, I must marry him. I can trifle with my future no longer. I must be free of this slavery to grandmother. I must be free. He can free me, and I can manage him, for he is afraid of me."

"Did I hurt you?" Craig was asking.

She nodded.

"I am so sorry," he exclaimed. "But when I touched you I forgot—everything!"

She smiled gently at him. "I didn't dream you cared for me," she said.

He laughed with a boisterousness that irritated her. "I'd never have dared tell you," replied he, "if I hadn't seen that you cared for me."

Her nerves winced, but she contrived to make her tone passable as she inquired: "Why do you say that?"

"Oh—the day in the garden—the day I came pleading for Grant. I saw it in your eyes—You remember."

Margaret could not imagine what he had misinterpreted so flatteringly to himself. But what did it matter? How like ironic fate, to pierce him with a chance shaft when all the shafts she had aimed had gone astray!

She was startled by his seizing her again. At his touch she flamed. "Don't!" she cried imperiously. "I don't like it!"

He laughed, held her the more tightly, kissed her half a dozen times squarely upon the lips. "Not that tone to me," said he. "I shall kiss you when I please."

She was furiously angry; but again her nerves were trembling, were responding to those caresses, and even as she hated him for violating her lips, she longed for him to continue to violate them. She started up. "Let us go," she cried.

He glanced at his watch. "I'll have to put you in a car," said he. "I forgot all about my appointment." And he fumed with impatience while she was adjusting her hat and veil pushed awry by his boisterous love-making. "It's the same old story," he went on. "Woman weakens man. You are a weakness with me—one that will cost me dear."

She burned with a sense of insult. She hated him, longed to pour out denunciations, to tell him just what she thought of him. She felt a contempt for herself deeper than her revulsion against him. In silence she let him hurry her along to a car; she scarcely heard what he was saying—his tactless, angry outburst against himself and her for his tardiness at that important appointment. She dropped into the seat with a gasp of relief. She felt she must—for form's sake—merely for form's sake—glance out of the window for the farewell he would be certain to expect; she must do her part, now that she had committed herself. She glanced; he was rushing away, with never a backward look—or thought. It was her crowning humiliation. "I'll make him pay for all this, some day!" she said to herself, shaking with anger, her grandmother's own temper raging cyclonically within her.

CHAPTER X

A BELATED PROPOSAL

Her mood—outraged against Craig, sullenly determined to marry him, angry with her relatives, her mother no less than her grandmother, because they were driving her to these desperate measures—this mood persisted, became

intenser, more imperious in its demand for a sacrifice as the afternoon wore on. When Grant Arkwright came, toward six o'clock, she welcomed him, the first-comer bringing her the longed-for chance to discharge the vials of her wrath. And she noted with pleasure that he, too, was in a black humor. Before she could begin he burst forth:

"What's this that Josh Craig has been telling me? He seems to have gone stark mad!"

Margaret eyed him with icy disdain. "If there is any quality that can be called the most repulsive," said she, "it is treachery. You've fallen into a way of talking of your friend Craig behind his back that's unworthy—perhaps not of you, but certainly of the person you pose as being."

"Did you propose to him this afternoon?" demanded Grant.

Margaret grew cold from head to foot. "Does he say I did?" she succeeded in articulating.

"He does. He was so excited that he jumped off a car and held me an hour telling me, though he was late for one of those important conferences he's always talking about."

Margaret had chosen her course. "Did he ask you to run and tell me he had told you?" inquired she, with the vicious gleam of a vicious temper in her fine hazel eyes.

"No," admitted Grant. "I suppose I've no right to tell you. But it was such an INFERNAL lie."

"Did you tell him so?"

Arkwright grew red.

"I see you did not," said Margaret. "I knew you did not. Now, let me tell you, I don't believe Craig said anything of the kind. A man who'd betray a friend is quite capable of lying about him."

"Margaret! Rita Severence!" Grant started up, set down his teacup, stood looking down at her, his face white to the lips. "Your tone is not jest; it is insult."

"It was so intended." Margaret's eyes were upon him, her grandmother's own favorite expression in them. Now that she was no longer a matrimonial offering she felt profoundly indifferent to eligible men, rejoiced in her freedom to act toward them as she wished. "I do not permit any one to lie to me about the man I have engaged to marry."

"What!" shouted Grant. "It was TRUE?"

"Go out into the garden and try to calm yourself, Grant," said the girl haughtily. "And if you can't, why—take yourself off home. And don't come back until you are ready to apologize."

"Rita, why didn't you give me a hint? I'd have married you myself. I'm willing to do it.... Rita, will you marry me?"

Margaret leaned back upon the sofa and laughed until his blood began to run alternately hot and cold.

"I beg your pardon," he stammered. "I did not realize how it sounded. Only—you know how things are with our sort of people. And, as men go, I can't help knowing I'm what's called a catch, and that you're looking for a suitable husband.... As it's apparently a question of him or me, and as you've admitted you got him by practically proposing —...Damn it all, Rita, I want you, and I'm not going to let such a man as he is have you. I never dreamed you'd bother with him seriously or I'd not have been so slow."

Margaret was leaning back, looking up at him. "I've sunk even lower than I thought," she said, bringing to an end the painful silence which followed this speech.

"What do you mean, Rita?"

She laughed cynically, shrugged her shoulders. First, Craig's impudent assumption that she loved him, and his rude violation of her lips; now, this frank insolence of insult, the more savage that it was unconscious—and from the oldest and closest of her men friends. If one did not die under such outrages, but continued to live and let live, one could save the situation only by laughing. So, Margaret laughed—and Arkwright shivered.

"For God's sake, Rita!" he cried. "I'd not have believed that lips so young and fresh as yours could utter such a cynical sound."

She looked at him with disdainful, derisive eyes. "It's fortunate for me that I have a sense of humor," said she. "And for you," she added.

"But I am in earnest, I mean it—every word I said."

"That's just it," replied she. "You meant it—every word."

"You will marry me?"

"I will not."

"Why?"

"For several reasons. For instance, I happen to be engaged to another man."

"That is—nothing." He snapped his fingers.

She elevated her brows. "Nothing?"

"He'd not keep his promise to you if—In fact, he was debating with me whether or not he'd back down."

"Either what you say is false," said she evenly, "or you are betraying the confidence of a friend who trusted in your

honor."

"Oh, he said it, all right. You know how he is about confidences."

"No matter."

Margaret rose slowly, a gradual lifting of her long, supple figure. Grant watching, wondered why he had never before realized that the sensuous charm of her beauty was irresistible. "Where were my eyes?" he asked himself. "She's beyond any of the women I've wasted so much time on."

She was saying with quiet deliberateness: "A few days ago, Grant, I'd have jumped at your offer—to be perfectly frank. Why shouldn't I be frank! I'm sick of cowardly pretenses and lies. I purpose henceforth to be myself—almost." A look within and a slightly derisive smile. "Almost. I shall hesitate and trifle no longer. I shall marry your friend Craig."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," raged Arkwright. "If you make it necessary I'll tell him why you're marrying him."

"You may do as you like about that," replied she. "He'll probably understand why you are trying to break off our engagement."

"You're very confident of your power over him," taunted he.

She saw again Craig's face as he was kissing her. "Very," replied she.

"You'll see. It's a mere physical attraction."

She smiled tantalizingly, her long body displayed against the window-casing, her long, round arms bare below the elbows, her hazel eyes and sensuous lips alluring. "You, yourself, never thought of proposing to me until I had made myself physically attractive to you," said she. "Now—have I power over you, or not?"

She laughed as his color mounted, and the look she had seen in Craig's eyes blazed out in his.

"How little physical charm you have for me," she went on. "Beside Craig you're like an electric fan in competition with a storm-wind. Now, Craig—" She closed her eyes and drew a long breath.

Arkwright gnawed his lip. "What a—a DEVIL you ARE!" he exclaimed.

"I wonder why it is a woman never becomes desirable to some men until they find she's desired elsewhere," she went on reflectively. "What a lack of initiative. What timidity. What an absence of originality. If I had nothing else against you, Grant, I'd never forgive you for having been so long blind to my charms—you and these other men of our set who'll doubtless be clamorous now."

"If you'd been less anxious to please," suggested he bitterly, "and more courageous about being your own real self, you'd not have got yourself into this mess."

"Ah—but that wasn't my fault," replied she absently. "It was the fault of my training. Ever since I can remember I've been taught to be on my guard, lest the men shouldn't like me." In her new freedom she looked back tranquilly upon the struggle she was at last emancipated from, and philosophized about it. "What a mistake mothers make in putting worry about getting a husband into their daughters' heads. Believe me, Grant, that dread makes wretched what ought to be the happiest time of a girl's life."

"Rita," he pleaded, "stop this nonsense, and say you'll marry me."

"No, thanks," said she. "I've chosen. And I'm well content."

She gave him a last tantalizing look and went out on the veranda, to go along it to the outdoor stairway. Arkwright gazed after her through a fierce conflict of emotions. Was she really in earnest? Could it be possible that Josh Craig had somehow got a hold over her? "Or, is it that she doesn't trust me, thinks I'd back down if she were to throw him over and rely on me?" No, there was something positively for Craig in her tone and expression. She was really intending to marry him. Grant shuddered. "If she only realized what marrying a man of that sort means!" he exclaimed, half aloud. "But she doesn't. Only a woman who has been married can appreciate what sort of a hell for sensitive nerves and refined tastes marriage can be made."

"Ah—Mr. Arkwright!"

At this interruption in a woman's voice—the voice he disliked and dreaded above all others—he startled and turned to face old Madam Bowker in rustling black silk, with haughty casque of gray-white hair and ebon staff carried firmly, well forward. Grant bowed. "How d'ye do, Mrs. Bowker?" said he with respectful deference. What he would have thought was the impossible had come to pass. He was glad to see her. "She'll put an end to this nonsense—this nightmare," said he to himself.

Madam Bowker had Williams, the butler, and a maid-servant in her train. She halted, gazed round the room; she pointed with the staff to the floor a few feet from the window and a little back. "Place my chair there," commanded she.

The butler and the maid hastened to move a large carved and gilded chair to the indicated spot. Madam Bowker seated herself with much ceremony.

"Now!" said she. "We will rearrange the room. Bring that sofa from the far corner to the other side of this window, and put the tea-table in front of it. Put two chairs where the sofa was; arrange the other chairs—" And she indicated the places with her staff.

While the room was still in confusion Mrs. Severence entered. "What is it, Mamma?" she asked.

"Simply trying to make this frightful room a little less frightful."

"Don't you think the pictures should be rehung to suit the new arrangement, ma'am?" suggested Arkwright.

Madam Bowker, suspicious of jest, looked sharply at him. He seemed serious. "You are right," said she.

"But people will be coming in a few minutes," pleaded Roxana.

"Then to-morrow," said Madam Bowker reluctantly. "That will do, Williams—that will do, Betty. And, Betty, you must go at once and make yourself neat. You've had on that cap two days."

"No, indeed, ma'am!" protested Betty.

"Then it was badly done up. Roxana, how can you bear to live in such a slovenly way?"

"Will you have tea now, Mamma?" was Roxana's diplomatic reply.

"Yes," answered the old lady.

"Tea, Mr. Arkwright?"

"Thanks, no, Mrs. Severence. I'm just going. I merely looked in to—to congratulate Rita."

Madam Bowker clutched her staff. "To congratulate my granddaughter? Upon what, pray?"

Arkwright simulated a look of surprise. "Upon her engagement."

"Her WHAT?" demanded the old lady, while Roxana sat holding a lump of sugar suspended between bowl and cup.

"Her engagement to Josh Craig."

"No such thing!" declared the old lady instantly. "Really, sir, it is disgraceful that MY granddaughter's name should be associated in ANY connection with such a person."

Here Margaret entered the room by the French windows by which she had left. She advanced slowly and gracefully, amid a profound silence. Just as she reached the tea-table her grandmother said in a terrible voice: "Margaret!"

"Yes, Grandmother," responded Margaret smoothly, without looking at her.

"Mr. Arkwright here has brought in a scandalous story about your being engaged to that—that Josh person—the clerk in one of the departments. Do you know him?"

"Yes, Grandma. But not very well."

Madam Bowker glanced triumphantly at Arkwright; he was gazing amazedly at Margaret.

"You see, Grant," said Roxana, with her foolish, pleasant laugh, "there is nothing in it."

"In what?" asked Margaret innocently, emptying the hot water from her cup.

"In the story of your engagement, dear," said her mother.

"Oh, yes, there is," replied Margaret with a smiling lift of her brows. "It's quite true." Then, suddenly drawing herself up, she wheeled on Grant with a frown as terrible as her grandmother's own. "Be off!" she said imperiously.

Arkwright literally shrank from the room. As he reached the door he saw her shiver and heard her mutter, "Reptile!"

CHAPTER XI

MADAM BOWKER HEARS THE NEWS

In the midst of profound hush Madam Bowker was charging her heavy artillery, to train it upon and demolish the engagement certainly, and probably Margaret, too. Just as she was about to open fire callers were ushered in. As luck had it they were the three Stillwater girls, hastily made-over Westerners, dressed with great show of fashion in what purported to be imported French hats and gowns. An expert eye, however, would instantly have pierced the secret of this formidable array of plumes and furbelows. The Stillwaters fancied they had exquisite taste and real genius in the art of dress. Those hats were made at home, were adaptations of the imported hats—adaptations of the kind that "see" the original and "go it a few better." As for the dresses, the Stillwaters had found one of those treasures dear to a certain kind of woman, had found a "woman just round the corner, and not established yet"—"I assure you, my dear, she takes a mental picture of the most difficult dress to copy, and you'd never know hers from the original—and SO reasonable!"

In advance came Molly Stillwater, the youngest and prettiest and the most aggressively dressed because her position as family beauty made it incumbent upon her to lead the way in fashion. As soon as the greetings were over—cold, indeed, from Madam Bowker, hysterical from Roxana—Molly gushed out: "Just as we left home, Josh Craig

came tearing in. If possible, madder than a hatter—yes—really—" Molly was still too young to have learned to control the mechanism of her mouth; thus, her confused syntax seemed the result of the alarming and fascinating contortions of her lips and tongue—"and, when we told him where we were going he shouted out, 'Give Rita my love.'"

Margaret penetrated to the purpose to anger her against Craig. Was not Craig intended by Mrs. Stillwater for Jessie, the eldest and only serious one of the three? And was not his conduct, his hanging about Margaret and his shying off from Jessie, thoroughly up on public questions and competent to discuss them with anybody—was not his conduct most menacing to her plans? Mrs. Stillwater, arranging for matrimony for all her daughters, had decided that Jess was hopeless except as a "serious woman," since she had neither figure nor face, nor even abundant hair, which alone is enough to entangle some men. So, Jess had been set to work at political economy, finance, at studying up the political situations; and, if started right and not interfered with, she could give as good account of her teaching as any phonograph.

Margaret welcomed Molly's message from Craig with a sweet smile. An amused glance at the thunderous face of her grandmother, and she said, "Perhaps it would interest you, dear, to know that he and I are engaged."

What could Madam Bowker say? What could she do? Obviously, nothing. The three Stillwaters became hysterical. Their comments and congratulations were scraps of disjointed nonsense, and they got away under cover of more arrivals, in as great disorder as if the heavy guns Madam Bowker had stacked to the brim for Margaret had accidentally discharged into them. Madam Bowker could wait no longer. "Margaret," said she, "help me to my carriage."

Mrs. Severence gave her difficult daughter an appealing glance, as if she feared the girl would cap the climax of rebellion by flatly refusing; but Margaret said sweetly:

"Yes, Grandma."

The two left the room, the old lady leaning heavily on her granddaughter and wielding her ebony staff as if getting her arm limbered to use it. In the hall, she said fiercely, "To your room," and waved her staff toward the stairway.

Margaret hesitated, shrugged her shoulders. She preceding, and Madam Bowker ascending statelily afterward, they went up and were presently alone in Margaret's pretty rose and gold boudoir, with the outer door closed.

"Now!" exclaimed Madam Bowker.

"Not so loud, please," suggested the tranquil Margaret, "unless you wish Selina to hear." She pointed to the door ajar. "She's sewing in there."

"Send the woman away," commanded the old lady.

But Margaret merely closed the door. "Well, Grandmother?"

"Sit at this desk," ordered the old lady, pointing with the ebony staff, "and write a note to that man Craig, breaking the engagement. Say you have thought it over and have decided it is quite impossible. And to-morrow morning you go to New York with me."

Margaret seated herself on the lounge instead. "I'll do neither," said she.

The old lady waved the end of her staff in a gesture of lofty disdain. "As you please. But, if you do not, your allowance is withdrawn."

"Certainly," said Margaret. "I assumed that."

Madam Bowker gazed at her with eyes like tongues of flame. "And how do you expect to live?" she inquired.

"That is OUR affair," replied the girl. "You say you are done with me. Well, so am I done with you."

It was, as Margaret had said, because she was not afraid of her grandmother that that formidable old lady respected her; and as she was one of those who can give affection only where they give respect, she loved Margaret—loved her with jealous and carping tenacity. The girl's words of finality made her erect and unyielding soul shiver in a sudden dreary blast of loneliness, that most tragic of all the storms that sweep the ways of life. It was in the tone of the anger of love with the beloved that she cried, "How DARE you engage yourself to such a person!"

"You served notice on me that I must marry," replied the girl, her own tone much modified. "He was the chance that offered."

"The chance!" Madam Bowker smiled with caustic scorn, "He's not a chance."

"You ordered me to marry. I am marrying. And you are violating your promise. But I expected it."

"My promise? What do you mean?"

"You told me if I'd marry you'd continue my allowance after marriage. You even hinted you'd increase it."

"But this is no marriage. I should consider a connection between such a man and a Severence as a mere vulgar intrigue. You might as well run away with a coachman. I have known few coachmen so ill-bred—so repellent—as this Craig."

Margaret laughed cheerfully. "He isn't what you'd call polished, is he?"

Her grandmother studied her keenly. "Margaret," she finally said, "this is some scheme of yours. You are using this engagement to help you to something else."

"I refused Grant Arkwright just before you came."

"You—refused—Arkwright?"

"My original plan was to trap Grant by making him jealous of Craig. But I abandoned it."

"And why?"

"A remnant of decency."

"I doubt it," said the old lady.

"So should I in the circumstances. We're a pretty queer lot, aren't we? You, for instance—on the verge of the grave, and breaking your promise to me as if a promise were nothing."

Mrs. Bowker's ebon staff twitched convulsively and her terrible eyes were like the vent-holes of internal fires; but she managed her rage with a skill that was high tribute to her will-power. "You are right in selecting this clown—this tag-rag," said she. "You and he, I see, are peculiarly suited to each other.... My only regret is that in my blind affection I have wasted all these years and all those thousands of dollars on you." Madam Bowker affected publicly a fine scorn of money and all that thereto appertained; but privately she was a true aristocrat in her reverence and consideration for that which is the bone and blood of aristocracy.

"Nothing so stupid and silly as regret," said Margaret, with placid philosophy of manner. "I, too, could think of things I regret. But I'm putting my whole mind on the future."

"Future!" Madam Bowker laughed. "Why, my child, you have no future. Within two years you'll either be disgracefully divorced, or the wife of a little lawyer in a little Western town."

"But I'll have my husband and my children. What more can a woman ask?"

The old lady scrutinized her granddaughter's tranquil, delicate face in utter amazement. She could find nothing on which to base a hope that the girl was either jesting or posing. "Margaret," she cried, "are you CRAZY?"

"Do you think a desire for a home, and a husband who adores one, and children whom one adores is evidence of insanity?"

"Yes, you are mad—quite mad!"

"I suppose you think that fretting about all my seasons without an offer worth accepting has driven me out of my senses. Sometimes I think so, too." And Margaret lapsed into abstracted, dreamy silence.

"Do you pretend that you—you—care for—this person?" inquired the old lady.

"I can't discuss him with you, Grandmother," replied the girl. "You know you have washed your hands of me."

"I shall never give up," cried the old lady vehemently, "until I rescue you. I'll not permit this disgrace. I'll have him driven out of Washington."

"Yes, you might try that," said Margaret. "I don't want him to stay here. I am sick—sick to death—of all this. I loathe everything I ever liked. It almost seems to me I'd prefer living in a cabin in the back-woods. I've just wakened to what it really means—no love, no friendship, only pretense and show, rivalry in silly extravagance, aimless running to and fro among people that care nothing for one, and that one cares nothing for. If you could see it as I see it you'd understand."

But Madam Bowker had thought all her life in terms of fashion and society. She was not in the least impressed. "Balderdash!" said she with a jab at the floor with the ebony staff. "Don't pose before me. You know very well you're marrying this man because you believe he will amount to a great deal."

Margaret beamed upon her grandmother triumphantly, as if she had stepped into a trap that had been set for her. "And your only reason for being angry," cried she, "is that you don't believe he will."

"I know he won't. He can't. Stillwater has kept him solely because that unspeakable wife of his hopes to foist their dull, ugly eldest girl on him."

"You think a man as shrewd as Stillwater would marry his daughter to a nobody?"

"It's useless for you to argue, Margaret," snapped the old lady. "The man's impossible—for a Severence. I shall stop the engagement."

"You can't," rejoined Margaret calmly. "My mind is made up. And along with several other qualities, Grandmother, dear, I've inherited your will."

"Will without wit—is there anything worse? But I know you are not serious. It is merely a mood—the result of a profound discouragement. My dear child, let me assure you it is no unusual thing for a girl of your position, yet without money, to have no offers at all. You should not believe the silly lies your girlfriends tell about having bushels of offers. No girl has bushels of offers unless she makes herself common and familiar with all kinds of men—and takes their loose talk seriously. Most men wouldn't dare offer themselves to you. The impudence of this Craig! You should have ordered him out of your presence."

Margaret, remembering how Craig had seized her, smiled.

"I admit I have been inconsiderate in urging you so vigorously," continued her grandmother. "I thought I had observed a tendency to fritter. I wished you to stop trifling with Grant Arkwright—or, rather, to stop his trifling with you. Come, now, my dear, let me put an end to this engagement. And you will marry Grant, and your future will be bright and assured."

Margaret shook her head. "I have promised," said she, and her expression would have thrilled Lucia.

Madam Bowker was singularly patient with this evidence of sentimentalism. "That's fine and noble of you. But you didn't realize what a grave step you were taking, and you—"

"Yes, but I did. If ever anything was deliberate on a woman's part, that engagement was." A bright spot burned in each of the girl's cheeks. "He didn't really propose. I pretended to misunderstand him."

Her grandmother stared.

"You needn't look at me like that," exclaimed Margaret. "You know very well that Grandfather Bowker never would have married you if you hadn't fairly compelled him. I heard him tease you about it once when I was a little girl."

It was Madam Bowker's turn to redden. She deigned to smile. "Men are so foolish," observed she, "that women often have to guide them. There would be few marriages of the right sort if the men were not managed."

Margaret nodded assent. "I realize that now," said she. Earnestly: "Grandmother, try to make the best of this engagement of mine. When a woman, a woman as experienced and sensible as I am, makes up her mind a certain man is the man for her, is it wise to interfere?"

Madam Bowker, struck by the searching wisdom of this remark, was silenced for the moment. In the interval of thought she reflected that she would do well to take counsel of herself alone in proceeding to break this engagement. "You are on the verge of making a terrible misstep, child," said she with a gentleness she had rarely shown even to her favorite grandchild. "I shall think it over, and you will think it over. At least, promise me you will not see Craig for a few days."

Margaret hesitated. Her grandmother, partly by this unusual gentleness, partly by inducing the calmer reflection of the second thought, had shaken her purpose more than she would have believed possible. "If I've made a mistake," said she, "isn't seeing him the best way to realize it?"

"Yes," instantly and emphatically admitted the acute old lady. "See him, by all means. See as much of him as possible. And in a few days you will be laughing at yourself—and very much ashamed."

"I wonder," said Margaret aloud, but chiefly to herself.

And Madam Bowker, seeing the doubt in her face, only a faint reflection of the doubt that must be within, went away content.

CHAPTER XII

PUTTING DOWN A MUTINY

Margaret made it an all but inflexible rule not to go out, but to rest and repair one evening in each week; that was the evening, under the rule, but she would have broken the rule had any opportunity offered. Of course, for the first time since the season began, no one sent or telephoned to ask her to fill in at the last moment. She half-expected Craig, though she knew he was to be busy; he neither came nor called up. She dined moodily with the family, sat surlily in a corner of the veranda until ten o'clock, hid herself in bed. She feared she would have a sleepless night. But she had eaten no dinner; and, as indigestion is about the only thing that will keep a healthy human being awake, she slept dreamlessly, soundly, not waking until Selina slowly and softly opened the inner blinds of her bedroom at eight the next morning.

There are people who are wholly indifferent about their surroundings, and lead the life dictated by civilized custom only because they are slaves of custom, Margaret was not one of these. She not only adopted all the comforts and luxuries that were current, she also spent much tune in thinking out new luxuries, new refinements upon those she already had. She was through, and through the luxurious idler; she made of idling a career—pursued it with intelligent purpose where others simply drifted, yawning when pastimes were not provided for them. She was as industrious and ingenious at her career as a Craig at furthering himself and his ideas in a public career.

Like the others of her class she left the care of her mind to chance. As she had a naturally good mind and a bird-like instinct for flitting everywhere, picking out the food from the chaff, she made an excellent showing even in the company of serious people. But that was accident. Her person was her real care. To her luxurious, sensuous nature every kind of pleasurable physical sensation made keen appeal, and she strove in every way to make it keener. She took the greatest care of her health, because health meant beauty and every nerve and organ in condition to enjoy to its uttermost capacity.

Because of this care it was often full three hours and half between the entrance of Selina and her own exit, dressed and ready for the day. And those three hours and a half were the happiest of her day usually, because they were full of those physical sensations in which she most delighted. Her first move, after Selina had awakened her, was to spend half an hour in "getting the yawns out." She had learned this interesting, pleasant and amusing trick from a baby in a house where she had once spent a week. She would extend herself at full length in the bed, and then slowly stretch each separate muscle of arm and leg, of foot and hand, of neck and shoulders and waist. This stretching process was accompanied by a series of prolonged, profound, luxurious yawns.

The yawning exercise completed, she rose and took before a long mirror a series of other exercises, some to strengthen her waist, others to keep her back straight and supple, others to make firm the contour of her face and throat. A half-hour of this, then came her bath. This was no hurried plunge, drying and away, but a long and elaborate function at which Selina assisted. There had to be water of three temperatures; a dozen different kinds of brushes, soaps, towels and other apparatus participated. When it was finished Margaret's skin glowed and shone, was soft and smooth and exhaled a delicious odor of lilacs. During the exercises Selina had been getting ready the clothes for the day—everything fresh throughout, and everything delicately redolent of the same essence of lilacs with which Selina had rubbed her from hair to tips of fingers and feet. The clothes were put on slowly, for Margaret delighted in the feeling of soft silks and laces being drawn over her skin. She let Selina do every possible bit of work, and gave herself up wholly to the joy of being cared for.

"There isn't any real reason why I shouldn't be doing this for you, instead of your doing it for me—is there, Selina?" mused she aloud.

"Goodness gracious, Miss Rita!" exclaimed Selina, horrified. "I wouldn't have it done for anything. I was brought up to be retiring about dressing. It was my mother's dying boast that no man, nor no woman, had ever seen her, a grown woman, except fully dressed."

"Really?" said Margaret absently. She stood up, surveyed herself in the triple mirror—back, front, sides. "So many women never look at themselves in the back," observed she, "or know how their skirts hang about the feet. I believe in dressing for all points of view."

"You certainly are just perfect," said the adoring Selina, not the least part of her admiring satisfaction due to the fact that the toilette was largely the creation of her own hands. "And you smell like a real lady—not noisy, like some that comes here. I hate to touch their wraps or to lay 'em down in the house. But you—It's one of them smells that you ain't sure whether you smelt it or dreamed it."

"Pretty good, Selina!" said Margaret. She could not but be pleased with such a compliment, one that could have been suggested only by the truth. "The hair went up well this morning, didn't it?"

"Lovely—especially in the back. It looks as if it had been marcelled, without that common, barbery stiffness-like."

"Yes, the back is good. And I like this blouse. I must wear it oftener."

"You can't afford to favor it too much, Miss Rita. You know you've got over thirty, all of them beauties."

"Some day, when I get time, we must look through my clothes. I want to give you a lot of them.... What DOES become of the time? Here it is, nearly eleven. See if breakfast has come up. I'll finish dressing afterward if it has."

It had. It was upon a small table in the rose and gold boudoir. And the sun, shining softly in at the creeper-shaded window, rejoiced in the surpassing brightness and cleanness of the dishes of silver and thinnest porcelain and cut glass. Margaret thought eating in bed a "filthy, foreign fad," and never indulged in it. She seated herself lazily, drank her coffee, and ate her roll and her egg slowly, deliberately, reading her letters and glancing at the paper. A charming picture she made—the soft, white Valenciennes of her matinee falling away from her throat and setting off the clean, smooth healthiness of her skin, the blackness of her vital hair; from the white lace of her petticoat's plaited flounces peered one of her slim feet, a satin slipper upon the end of it. At the top of the heap of letters lay one she would have recognized, she thought, had she never seen the handwriting before.

"Sure to be upsetting," reflected she; and she laid it aside, glancing now and then at the bold, nervous, irregular hand and speculating about the contents and about the writer.

She had gone to bed greatly disturbed in mind as to whether she was doing well to marry the obstreperous Westerner. "He fascinates me in a wild, weird sort of a way when I'm with him," she had said to herself before going to sleep, "and the idea of him is fascinating in certain moods. And it is a temptation to take hold of him and master and train him—like broncho-busting. But is it interesting enough for—for marriage? Wouldn't I get horribly tired? Wouldn't Grant and humdrum be better? less wearying?" And when she awakened she found her problem all but solved. "I'll send him packing and take Grant," she found herself saying, "unless some excellent reason for doing otherwise appears. Grandmother was right. Engaging myself to him was a mood." Once more she was all for luxury and ease and calmness, for the pleasant, soothing, cut-and-dried thing. "A cold bath or a rough rub-down now and then, once in a long while, is all very well. It makes one appreciate comfort and luxury more. But that sort of thing every day—many times each day—" Margaret felt her nerves rebelling as at the stroking of velvet the wrong way.

She read all her other letters, finished her toilette, had on her hat, and was having Selina put on her boots when she opened Craig's letter and read:

"I must have been out of my mind this afternoon. You are wildly fascinating, but you are not for me. If I led you to believe that I wished to marry you, pray forget it. We should make each other unhappy and, worse still, uncomfortable.

"Do I make myself clear? We are not engaged. I hope you will marry Arkwright; a fine fellow, in every way suited to you, and, I happen to know, madly in love with you. Please try to forgive me. If you have any feeling for me stronger than friendship you will surely get over it.

"Anyhow, we couldn't marry. That is settled.

"Let me have an answer to this. I shall be upset until I hear." No beginning. No end. Just a bald, brutal casting-off. A hint—more than a hint—of a fear that she would try to hold him in spite of himself. She smiled—small, even teeth clenched and eyelids contracted cruelly—as she read a second time, with this unflattering suggestion obtruding. The humiliation of being jilted! And by such a man!—the private shame—the public disgrace—She sprang up, crunching her foot hard down upon one of Selina's hands. "What is it?" said she angrily, at her maid's cry of pain.

"Nothing, Miss," replied Selina, quickly hiding the wounded hand. "You moved so quick I hadn't time to draw away. That was all."

"Then finish that boot!"

Selina had to expose the hand, Margaret looked down at it indifferently, though her heel had torn the skin away from the edge of the palm and had cut into the flesh.

"Hurry!" she ordered fiercely, as Selina fumbled and bungled.

She twitched and frowned with impatience while Selina finished buttoning the boot, then descended and called Williams. "Get me Mr. Craig on the telephone," she said.

"He's been calling you up several times to-day, ma'am,—"

"Ah!" exclaimed Margaret, eyes flashing with sudden delight.

"But we wouldn't disturb you."

"That was right," said Margaret. She was beaming now, was all sunny good humor. Even her black hair seemed to glisten in her simile. So! He had been calling up! Poor fool, not to realize that she would draw the correct inference from this anxiety.

"Shall I call him?" "No. I'll wait. Probably he'll call again soon. I'll be in the library."

She had not been roaming restlessly about there many minutes before Williams appeared "He's come, himself, ma'am," said he. "I told him I didn't know whether you'd be able to see him or not."

"Thank you, Williams," said Margaret sweetly. "Order the carriage to come round at once. Leave Mr. Craig in the drawing-room. I'll speak to him on the way out."

She dashed upstairs. "Selina! Selina!" she called. And when Selina came: "Let me see that hand. I hurt you because I got news that went through me like a knife. You understand, don't you?"

"It was nothing, Miss Rita," protested Selina. "I'd forgot it myself already."

But Margaret insisted on assuring herself with her own eyes, got blood on her white gloves, had to change them. As she descended she was putting on the fresh pair—a new pair. How vastly more than even the normal is a man's disadvantage in a "serious" interview with a woman if she is putting on new gloves! She is perfectly free to seem occupied or not, as suits her convenience; and she can, by wrestling with the gloves, interrupt him without speech, distract his attention, fiddle his thoughts, give him a sense of imbecile futility, and all the time offer him no cause for resentment against her. He himself seems in the wrong; she is merely putting On her gloves.

She was wrong in her guess that Arkwright had been at him. He had simply succumbed to his own fears and forebodings, gathered in force as soon as he was not protected from them by the spell of her presence. The mystery of the feminine is bred into men from earliest infancy, is intensified when passion comes and excites the imagination into fantastic activity about women. No man, not the most experienced, not the most depraved, is ever able wholly to divest himself of this awe, except, occasionally, in the case of some particular woman. Awe makes one ill at ease; the woman who, by whatever means, is able to cure a man of his awe of her, to make him feel free to be himself, is often able to hold him, even though he despises her or is indifferent to her; on the other hand, the woman who remains an object of awe to a man is certain to lose him. He may be proud to have her as his wife, as the mother of his children, but he will seek some other woman to give her the place of intimacy in his life.

At the outset on an acquaintance between a man and a woman his awe for her as the embodiment of the mystery feminine is of great advantage to her; it often gets him for her as a husband. In this particular case of Margaret Severence and Joshua Craig, while his awe of her was an advantage, it was also a disadvantage. It attracted him; it perilously repelled him. He liked to release his robust imagination upon those charms of hers—those delicate, refined beauties that filled him with longings, delicious in their intensity, longings as primeval in kind as well as in force as those that set delirious the savage hordes from the German forests when they first poured down over the Alps and beheld the jewels and marbles and round, smooth, soft women of Italy's ancient civilization. But at the same time he had the unmistakable, the terrifying feeling of dare-devil sacrilege. What were his coarse hands doing, dabbling in silks and cobweb laces and embroideries? Silk fascinated him; but, while he did not like calico so well, he felt at home with it. Yes, he had seized her, had crushed her madly in the embrace of his plowman arms. But that seemed now a freak of courage, a drunken man's deed, wholly beyond the nerve of sobriety.

Then, on top of all this awe was his reverence for her as an aristocrat, a representative of people who had for generations been far removed above the coarse realities of the only life he knew. And it was this adoration of caste that determined him. He might overcome his awe of her person and dress, of her tangible trappings; but how could he ever hope to bridge the gulf between himself and her intangible superiorities? He was ashamed of himself, enraged against himself for this feeling of worm gazing up at star. It made a mockery of all his arrogant, noisy protestations of equality and democracy.

"The fault is not in my ideas," thought he; "THEY'RE all right. The fault's in me—damned snob that I am!"

Clearly, if he was to be what he wished, if he was to become what he had thought he was, he must get away from this sinister influence, from this temptation that had made him, at first onset, not merely stumble, but fall flat and begin to grovel. "She is a superior woman—that is no snob notion of mine," reflected he. "But from the way I falter and get weak in the knees, she ought to be superhuman—which she isn't, by any means. No, there's only one thing to do—keep away from her. Besides, I'd feel miserable with her about as my wife." My wife! The very words threw him into a cold sweat.

So the note was written, was feverishly dispatched.

No sooner was it sent than it was repented. "What's the matter with me?" demanded he of himself, as his courage came swaggering back, once the danger had been banished. "Why, the best is not too good for me. She is the best, and mighty proud she ought to be of a man who, by sheer force of character, has lifted himself to where I am and who, is going to be what I shall be. Mighty proud! There are only two realities—money and brains. I've certainly got more brains than she or any of her set; as for money, she hasn't got that. The superiority is all on my side. I'm the one that ought to feel condescending."

What had he said in his note? Recalling it as well as he could—for it was one, the last, of more than a dozen notes he had written in two hours of that evening—recalling phrases he was pretty sure he had put into the one he had finally sent, in despair of a better, it seemed to him he had given her a wholly false impression—an impression of her superiority and of his fear and awe. That would never do. He must set her right, must show her he was breaking the engagement only because she was not up to his standard. Besides, he wished to see her again to make sure he had been victimized into an engagement by a purely physical, swiftly-evanescent imagining. Yes, he must see her, must have a look at her, must have a talk with her.

"It's the only decent, courageous thing to do in the circumstances. Sending that note looked like cowardice—would be cowardice if I didn't follow it up with a visit. And whatever else I am, surely I'm not a coward!"

Margaret had indulged in no masculine ingenuities of logic. Woman-like, she had gone straight to the practical point: Craig had written instead of coming—he was, therefore, afraid of her. Having written he had not fled, but had come—he was, therefore, attracted by her still. Obviously the game lay in her own hands, for what more could woman ask than that a man be both afraid and attracted? A little management and she not only would save herself from the threatened humiliation of being jilted—jilted by an uncouth nobody of a Josh Craig!—but also would have him in durance, to punish his presumption at her own good pleasure as to time and manner. If Joshua Craig, hardy plodder in the arduous pathway from plowboy to President, could have seen what was in the mind so delicately and so aristocratically entempled in that graceful, slender, ultra-feminine body of Margaret Severence's, as she descended the stairs, putting fresh gloves upon her beautiful, idle hands, he would have borrowed wings of the wind and would have fled as from a gorgon.

But as she entered the room nothing could have seemed less formidable except to the heart. Her spring dress—she was wearing it for the first time—was of a pale green, suggesting the draperies of islands of enchantment. Its lines coincided with the lines of her figure. Her hat, trimmed to match, formed a magic halo for her hair; and it, in turn, was the entrancing frame in which her small, quiet, pallid face was set—that delicate, sensitive face, from which shone, now softly and now brilliantly, those hazel eyes a painter could have borrowed for a wood nymph. In the doorway, before greeting him, she paused.

"Williams," she called, and Craig was thrilled by her "high-bred" accent, that seemed to him to make of the English language a medium different from the one he used and heard out home.

"Yes, ma'am," came the answer in the subtly-deferential tone of the aristocracy of menialdom, conjuring for Craig, with the aid of the woman herself and that aristocratic old room, a complete picture of the life of upper-class splendor.

"Did you order the carriage, as I asked?"

"Yes, ma'am; it's at the door."

"Thank you." And Margaret turned upon an overwhelmed and dazzled Craig. He did not dream that she had calculated it all with a view to impressing him—and, if he had, the effect would hardly have been lessened. Whether planned or not, were not toilette and accent, and butler and carriage, all realities? Nor did he suspect shrewd calculations upon snobbishness when she said: "I was in such haste to dress that I hurt my poor maid's hand as she was lacing my boot"—she thrust out one slender, elegantly-clad foot—"no, buttoning it, I mean." Oh, these ladies, these ladies of the new world—and the old—that are so used to maids and carriages and being waited upon that they no more think of display in connection with them than one would think of boasting two legs or two eyes!

The advantage from being in the act of putting on gloves began at the very outset. It helped to save her from deciding a mode of salutation. She did not salute him at all. It made the meeting a continuation, without break, of their previous meeting.

"How do you like my new dress?" she asked, as she drew the long part of her glove up her round, white arm.

"Beautiful," he stammered.

From the hazel eyes shot a shy-bold glance straight into his; it was as if those slim, taper fingers of hers had twanged the strings of the lyre of his nerves. "You despise all this sort of trumpery, don't you?"

"Sometimes a man says things he don't mean," he found tongue to utter.

"I understand," said she sympathetically, and he knew she meant his note. But he was too overwhelmed by his surroundings, by her envelope of aristocracy, too fascinated by her physical charm, too flattered by being on such terms with such a personage, to venture to set her right. Also, she gave him little chance; for in almost the same breath she went on: "I've been in such moods!—since yesterday afternoon—like the devils in Milton, isn't it?—that are swept from lands of ice to lands of fire?—or is it in Dante? I never can remember. We must go straight off, for I'm late. You can come, too—it's only a little meeting about some charity or other. All rich people, of course—except poor me. I'm sure I don't know why they asked me. I can give little besides advice. How handsome you are to-day, Joshua!"

It was the first time she had called him by his first name. She repeated it—"Joshua—Joshua"—as when one hits upon some particularly sweet and penetrating chord at the piano, and strikes it again, and yet again.

They were in the carriage, being whirled toward the great palace of Mrs. Whitson, the latest and grandest of

plutocratic monuments that have arisen upon the ruins of the old, old-fashioned American Washington. And she talked incessantly—a limpid, sparkling, joyous strain. And either her hand sought his or his hers; at any rate, he found himself holding her hand. They were almost there before he contrived to say, very falteringly: "You got my note?"

She laughed gayly. "Oh, yes—and your own answer to it, Joshua—my love"—the "my love" in a much lower, softer tone, with suggestion of sudden tears trembling to fall.

"But I meant it," he said, though in tones little like any he was used to hearing from his own lips. But he would not dare look himself in the face again if he did not make at least a wriggle before surrendering.

"We mean many things in as many moods," said she. "I knew it was only a mood. I knew you'd come. I've such a sense of implicit reliance on you. You are to me like the burr that shields the nut from all harm. How secure and cozy and happy the nut must feel in its burr. As I've walked through the woods in the autumn I've often thought of that, and how, if I ever married—"

A wild impulse to seize her and crush her, as one crushes the ripe berry for its perfume and taste, flared in his eyes. She drew away to check it. "Not now," she murmured, and her quick breath and flush were not art, but nature. "Not just now—Joshua."

"You make me—insane," he muttered between his teeth. "God!—I DO love you!"

They were arrived; were descending. And she led him, abject and in chains, into the presence of Mrs. Whitson and the most fashionable of the fashionable set. "So you've brought him along?" cried Mrs. Whitson. "Well, I congratulate you, Mr. Craig. It's very evident you have a shrewd eye for the prizes of life, and a strong, long reach to grasp them."

Craig, red and awkward, laughed hysterically, flung out a few meaningless phrases. Margaret murmured: "Perhaps you'd rather go?" She wished him to go, now that she had exhibited him.

"Yes—for Heaven's sake!" he exclaimed. He was clutching for his braggart pretense of ease in "high society" like a drowning man scooping armsful of elusive water.

She steered her captive in her quiet, easeful manner toward the door, sent him forth with a farewell glance and an affectionate interrogative, "This afternoon, at half-past four?" that could not be disobeyed.

The mutiny was quelled. The mutineer was in irons. She had told him she felt quite sure about him; and it was true, in a sense rather different from what the words had conveyed to him. But it was of the kind of security that takes care to keep the eye wakeful and the powder dry. She felt she did not have him yet where she could trust him out of her sight and could herself decide whether the engagement was to be kept or broken.

"Why, my dear," said Mrs. Whitson, "he positively feeds out of your hand! And such a wild man he seemed!"

Margaret, in the highest of high spirits, laughed with pleasure.

"A good many," pursued Mrs. Whitson, "think you are throwing yourself away for love. But as I size men up—and my husband says I'm a wonder at it—I think he'll be biggest figure of all at one end of Pennsylvania Avenue or the other. Perhaps, first one end, then at the other."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," cried Margaret, with the keen enthusiasm with which, in time of doubt, we welcome an ally to our own private judgment. "But," she hastened to add, with veiled eye and slightly tremulous lip, "I'm ready to take whatever comes."

"That's right! That's right!" exclaimed Mrs. Whitson, a tender and dreamy sentimentalist except in her own affairs. "Love is best!"

"Love is best," echoed Margaret.

CHAPTER XIII

A MEMORABLE MEETING

In that administration the man "next" the President was his Secretary of the Treasury, John Branch, cold and smooth and able, secreting, in his pale-gray soul, an icy passion for power more relentless than heat ever bred. To speak of him as unscrupulous would be like attributing moral quality to a reptile. For him principle did not exist, except as an eccentricity of some strangely-constructed men which might be used to keep them down. Life presented itself to him as a series of mathematical problems, as an examination in mathematics. To pass it meant a diploma as a success; to fail to pass meant the abysmal disgrace of obscurity. Cheating was permissible, but not to get caught at it. Otherwise Branch was the most amiable of men; and why should he not have been, his digestion being good, his income sufficient, his domestic relations admirable, and his reputation for ability growing apace? No one respected him, no one liked him; but every one admired him as an intellect moving quite unhampered of the restraints of conscience. In person he was rather handsome, the weasel type of his face being well concealed by fat and by judicious arrangements of mustache and side-whiskers. By profession he was a lawyer, and had been most successful as adviser to wholesale thieves on depredations bent or in search of immunity for depredations done. It was

incomprehensible to him why he was unpopular with the masses. It irritated him that they could not appreciate his purely abstract point of view on life; it irritated him because his unpopularity with them meant that there were limits, and very narrow ones, to his ambition.

It was to John Branch that Madam Bowker applied when she decided that Joshua Craig must be driven from Washington. She sent for him, and he came promptly. He liked to talk to her because she was one of the few who thoroughly appreciated and sympathized with his ideas of success in life. Also, he respected her as a personage in Washington, and had it in mind to marry his daughter, as soon as she should be old enough, to one of her grandnephews.

"Branch," said the old lady, with an emphatic wave of the ebony staff, "I want that Craig man sent away from Washington."

"Josh, the joke?" said Branch with a slow, sneering smile that had an acidity in it interesting in one so even as he.

"That's the man. I want you to rid us of him. He has been paying attention to Margaret, and she is encouraging him."

"Impossible!" declared Branch. "Margaret is a sensible girl and Josh has nothing—never will have anything."

"A mere politician!" declared Madam Bowker. "Like hundreds of others that wink in with each administration and wink out with it. He will not succeed even at his own miserable political game—and, if he did, he would still be poor as poverty."

"I don't think you need worry about him and Margaret. I repeat, she is sensible—an admirable girl—admirably brought up. She has distinction. She has the right instincts."

Madam Bowker punctuated each of these compliments with a nod of her haughty head. "But," said she, "Craig has convinced her that he will amount to something."

"Ridiculous!" scoffed Branch, with an airy wave of the hand. But there was in his tone a concealment that set the shrewd old lady furtively to watching him.

"What do they think of him among the public men?" inquired she.

"He's laughed at there as everywhere."

Her vigilance was rewarded; as Branch said that, malignance hissed, ever so softly, in his suave voice, and the snake peered furtively from his calm, cold eyes. Old Madam Bowker had not lived at Washington's great green tables for the gamblers of ambition all those years without learning the significance of eyes and tone. For one politician to speak thus venomously of another was sure sign that that other was of consequence; for John Branch, a very Machiavelli at self-concealment and usually too egotistic to be jealous, thus to speak, and that, without being able to conceal his venom—"Can it be possible," thought the old lady, "that this Craig is about to be a somebody?" Aloud she said: "He is a preposterous creature. The vilest manners I've seen in three generations of Washington life. And what vanity, what assumptions! The first time I met him he lectured me as if I were a schoolgirl—lectured me about the idle, worthless life he said I lead. I decided not to recognize him next time I saw him. Up he came, and without noticing that I did not speak he poured out such insults that I was answering him before I realized it."

"He certainly is a most exasperating person."

"So Western! The very worst the West ever sent us. I don't understand how he happened to get about among decent people. Oh, I remember, it was Grant Arkwright who did it. Grant picked him up on one of his shooting trips."

"He is insufferable," said Branch.

"You must see that the President gets rid of him. I want it done at once. I assure you, John, my alarm is not imaginary. Margaret is very young, has a streak of sentimentality in her. Besides, you know how weak the strongest women are before a determined assault. If the other sex wasn't brought up to have a purely imaginary fear of them I don't know what would become of the world."

Branch smiled appreciatively but absently. "The same is true of men," said he. "The few who amount to anything—at least in active life—base their calculations on the timidity and folly of their fellows rather than upon their own abilities. About Craig—I'd like to oblige you, but—well, you see, there is—there are certain political exigencies—"

"Nonsense!" interrupted the old lady. "I know the relative importance of officials. A mere understrapper like Craig is of no importance."

"The fact is," said Branch with great reluctance, "the President has taken a fancy to Craig."

Branch said it as if he hardly expected to be believed—and he wasn't. "To be perfectly frank," he went on, "you know the President, how easily alarmed he is. He's afraid Craig may, by some crazy turn of this crazy game of politics, develop into a Presidential possibility. Of course, it's quite absurd, but—"

"The more reason for getting rid of him."

"The contrary. The President probably reasons that, if Craig has any element of danger in him the nearer he keeps him to himself the better. Craig, back in the West, would be free to grow. Here the President can keep him down if necessary. And I think our friend Stillwater will succeed in entangling him disastrously in some case sooner or later." There Branch laughed pleasantly, as at the finding of the correct solution to a puzzling problem in analytics or calculus.

"What a cowardly, shadow-fighting, shadow-dodging set you men are!" commented Madam Bowker. Though she did not show it, as a man certainly would, her brain was busy with a wholly different phase of the matter they were

discussing.

"Isn't Stillwater going to retire?" she asked presently.

Branch startled. "Where did you hear that?" he demanded.

The old lady smiled. "There are no secrets in Washington," said she. "Who will be his successor?"

Branch's cold face showed annoyance. "You mustn't speak of it," replied he, "but the President is actually thinking of appointing Craig—in case the vacancy should occur. Of course, I am trying to make him see the folly of such a proceeding, but—You are right. Men are cowards. That insufferable upstart is actually bullying the President into a state of terror. Already he has compelled him to prosecute some of our best friends out in the Western country, and if the Courts weren't with us—" Branch checked himself abruptly. It was not the first time he had caught himself yielding to Washington's insidious custom of rank gossip about everything and everybody; but it was about his worst offense in that direction. "I'm getting to be as leaky as Josh Craig is—as he SEEMS to be," he muttered, so low, however, that not even her sharp ears caught it.

"So it is to be Attorney-General Craig," said the old lady, apparently abstracted but in reality catlike in watchfulness, and noting with secret pleasure Branch's anger at this explicit statement of the triumph of his hated rival.

"Isn't it frightful?" said Branch. "What is the country coming to?"

But she had lost interest in the conversation. She rid herself of Branch as speedily as the circumstances permitted. She wished to be alone, to revolve the situation slowly from the new viewpoint which Branch, half-unconsciously and wholly reluctantly, had opened up. She had lived a long time, had occupied a front bench overlooking one of the world's chief arenas of action. And, as she had an acute if narrow mind, she had learned to judge intelligently and to note those little signs that are, to the intelligent, the essentials, full of significance. She had concealed her amazement from Branch, but amazed she was, less at his news of Craig as a personage full of potentiality than at her own failure, through the inexcusable, manlike stupidity of personal pique, to discern the real man behind his mannerisms. "No wonder he has pushed so far, so fast," reflected she; for she appreciated that in a man of action manners should always be a cloak behind which his real campaign forms. It must be a fitting cloak, it should be a becoming one; But always a cloak. "He fools everybody, apparently," thought she. "The results of his secret work alarm them; then, along he comes, with his braggart, offensive manners, his childish posings, his peacock vanity, and they are lulled into false security. They think what he did was an accident that will not happen again. Why, he fooled even ME!"

That is always, with every human being, the supreme test, necessarily. Usually it means nothing. In this case of Cornelia Bowker it meant a great deal; for Cornelia Bowker was not easily fooled. The few who appear in the arena of ambition with no game to play, with only sentiment and principle to further, the few who could easily have fooled her cynical, worldly wisdom could safely be disregarded. She felt it was the part of good sense to look the young man over again, to make sure that the new light upon him was not false light. "He may be a mere accident in spite of his remarkable successes," thought she. "The same number sometimes comes a dozen times in succession at roulette." She sent her handy man, secretary, social manager and organizer, MAÎTRE D'HOTEL, companion, scout, gossip, purveyor of comfort, J. Worthington Whitesides, to seek out Craig and to bring him before her forthwith.

As Mr. Whitesides was a tremendous swell, in dress, in manner and in accent, Craig was much impressed when he came into his office in the Department of Justice. Whitesides' manner, the result of Madam Bowker's personal teaching, was one of his chief assets in maintaining and extending her social power. It gave the greatest solemnity and dignity to a summons from her, filled the recipient with pleasure and with awe, prepared him or her to be duly impressed and in a frame of mind suitable to Madam Bowker's purposes.

"I come from Madam Bowker," he explained to Craig, humbly conscious of his own disarray and toiler's unkemptness. "She would be greatly obliged if you will give her a few minutes of your time. She begs you to excuse the informality. She has sent me in her carriage, and it will be a great satisfaction to her if you will accompany me."

Craig's first impulse of snobbish satisfaction was immediately followed by misgivings. Perhaps this was not the formal acceptance of the situation by the terrible old woman as he had, on the spur, fancied. Perhaps she had sent for him to read him the riot act. Then he remembered that he was himself in doubt as to whether he wished to marry the young woman. All his doubts came flooding back, and his terrors—for, in some of its aspects, the idea of being married to this delicate flower of conventionality and gentle breeding was literally a terror to him. If he went he would be still further committing himself; all Washington would soon know of the journey in the carriage of Madam Bowker, the most imposing car of state that appeared in the streets of the Capital, a vast, lofty affair, drawn by magnificent horses, the coachman and footman in costly, quiet livery, high ensconced.

"No, thanks," said Josh, in his most bustlingly-bounderish manner. "Tell the old lady I'm up to my neck in work."

Mr. Whitesides was taken aback, but he was far too polished a gentleman to show it. "Perhaps later?" he suggested.

"I've promised Margaret to go out there later. If I get through here in time I'll look in on Mrs. Bowker on the way. But tell her not to wait at home for me."

Mr. Whitesides bowed, and was glad when the outer air was blowing off him the odor of this vulgar incident. "For," said he to himself, "there are some manners so bad that they have a distinct bad smell. He is 'the limit!' The little Severence must be infernally hard-pressed to think of taking him on. Poor child! She's devilish interesting. A really handsome bit, and smart, too—excellent ideas about dress. Yet somehow she's been marooned, overlooked, while far worse have been married well. Strange, that sort of thing. Somewhat my own case. I ought to have been able to get some girl with a bunch, yet I somehow always just failed to connect—until I got beyond the marrying age. Devilish lucky for me, too. I'm no end better off." And Mr. Whitesides, sitting correctly upon Madam Bowlder's gray silk

cushions, reflected complacently upon his ample salary, his carefully built-up and most lucrative commissions, his prospects for a "smashing-good legacy when her majesty deigns to pass away."

At four Madam Bowker, angry yet compelled to a certain respect, heard with satisfaction that Craig had come. "Leave me, Whitesides," said she. "I wish to be quite alone with him throughout."

Thus Craig, entering the great, dim drawing-room, with its panel paintings and its lofty, beautifully-frescoed ceiling, found himself alone with her. She was throned upon a large, antique gold chair, ebony scepter in one hand, the other hand white and young-looking and in fine relief against the black silk of her skirt; she bent upon him a keen, gracious look. Her hazel eyes were bright as a bird's; they had the advantage over a bird's that they saw—saw everything in addition to seeming to see.

Looking at him she saw a figure whose surfaces were, indeed, not extraordinarily impressive. Craig's frame was good; that was apparent despite his clothes. He had powerful shoulders, not narrow, yet neither were they of the broad kind that suggest power to the inexpert and weakness and a tendency to lung trouble to the expert. His body was a trifle long for his arms and legs, which were thick and strong, like a lion's or a tiger's. He had a fine head, haughtily set; his eyes emphasized the impression of arrogance and force. He had the leader's beaklike nose, a handsome form of it, like Alexander's, not like Attila's. The mouth was the orator's—wide, full and flexible of lips, fluent. It was distinctly not an aristocratic mouth. It suggested common speech and common tastes—ruddy tastes—tastes for quantity rather than for quality. His skin, his flesh were also plainly not aristocratic; they lacked that fineness of grain, that finish of surface which are got only by eating the costly, rare, best and best-prepared food. His hair, a partially disordered mop over-hanging his brow at the middle, gave him fierceness of aspect. The old lady had more than a suspicion that the ferocity of that lock of hair and somewhat exaggerated forward thrust of the jaw were pose—in part, at least, an effort to look the valiant and relentless master of men—perhaps concealing a certain amount of irresolution. Certainly those eyes met hers boldly rather than fearlessly.

She extended her hand. He took it, and with an effort gave it the politician's squeeze—the squeeze that makes Hiram Hanks and Bill Butts grin delightedly and say to each other: "B'gosh, he ain't lost his axe-handle grip yet, by a durn sight, has he?—dog-gone him!"

Madam Bowker did not wince, though she felt like it. Instead she smiled—a faint, derisive smile that made Craig color uncomfortably.

"You young man," said she in her cool, high-bred tones, "you wish to marry my granddaughter."

Craig was never more afraid nor so impressed in his life. But there was no upflaming of physical passion here to betray him into yielding before her as he had before her granddaughter. "I do not," replied he arrogantly. "Your granddaughter wants to marry me."

Madam Bowker winced in spite of herself. A very sturdy-appearing specimen of manhood was this before her; she could understand how her granddaughter might be physically attracted. But that rude accent, that common mouth, those uncouth clothes, hand-me-downs or near it, that cheap look about the collar, about the wrists, about the ankles —

"We are absolutely unsuited to each other—in every way," continued Craig. "I tell her so. But she won't listen to me. The only reason I've come here is to ask you to take a hand at trying to bring her to her senses."

The old lady, recovered from her first shock, gazed at him admiringly. He had completely turned her flank, and by a movement as swift as it was unexpected. If she opposed the engagement he could hail her as an ally, could compel her to contribute to her own granddaughter's public humiliation. On the other hand, if she accepted the engagement he would have her and Margaret and all the proud Severence family in the position of humbly seeking alliance with him. Admirable! No wonder Branch was jealous and the President alarmed. "Your game," said she pleasantly, "is extremely unkempt, but effective. I congratulate you. I owe you an apology for having misjudged you."

He gave her a shrewd look. "I know little Latin and less Greek," said he, "but, 'timeo Danaos dona ferentes.' And I've got no game. I'm telling you the straight truth, and I want you to help save me from Margaret and from myself. I love the girl. I honestly don't want to make her wretched. I need a sock-darner, a wash-counter, a pram-pusher, for a wife, as Grant would say, not a dainty piece of lace embroidery. It would soon be covered with spots and full of holes from the rough wear I'd give it."

Madam Bowker laughed heartily. "You are—delicious," said she. "You state the exact situation. Only I don't think Rita is quite so fragile as you fancy. Like all persons of common origin, Mr. Craig, you exaggerate human differences. They are not differences of kind, but of degree."

Craig quivered and reddened at "common origin," as Madam Bowker expected and hoped. She had not felt that she was taking a risk in thus hardily ignoring her own origin; Lard had become to her, as to all Washington, an unreality like a shadowy reminiscence of a possible former sojourn on earth. "I see," pursued she, "that I hurt your vanity by my frankness—"

"Not at all! Not at all!" blustered Joshua, still angrier—as Madam Bowker had calculated.

"Don't misunderstand me," pursued she tranquilly. "I was simply stating a fact without aspersion. It is the more to your credit that you have been able to raise yourself up among us—and so very young! You are not more than forty, are you?"

"Thirty-four," said Craig surlily. He began to feel like a cur that is getting a beating from a hand beyond the reach of its fangs. "I've had a hard life—"

"So I should judge," thrust the old lady with gentle sympathy. It is not necessary to jab violently with a red-hot iron in order to make a deep burn.

"But I am the better for it," continued Craig, eyes flashing and orator lips in action. "And you and your kind—your granddaughter Margaret—would be the better for having faced—for having to face—the realities of life instead of being pampered in luxury and uselessness."

"Then why be resentful?" inquired she. "Why not merely pity us? Why this heat and seeming jealousy?"

"Because I love your granddaughter," replied Craig, the adroit at debate. "It pains, it angers me to see a girl who might have been a useful wife, a good mother, trained and set to such base uses."

The old lady admired his skillful parry. "Let us not discuss that," said she. "We look at life from different points of view. No human being can see beyond his own point of view. Only God sees life as a whole, sees how its seeming inconsistencies and injustices blend into a harmony. Your mistake—pardon an old woman's criticism of experience upon inexperience—your mistake is that you arrogate to yourself divine wisdom and set up a personal opinion as eternal truth."

"That is very well said, admirably said," cried Craig. Madam Bowker would have been better pleased with the compliment had the tone been less gracious and less condescending.

"To return to the main subject," continued she. "Your hesitation about my granddaughter does credit to your manliness and to your sense. I have known marriages between people of different station and rank to turn out well—again—"

"That's the second or third time you've made that insinuation," burst out Craig. "I must protest against it, in the name of my father and mother, in the name of my country, Mrs. Bowker. It is too ridiculous! Who are you that you talk about rank and station? What is Margaret but the daughter of a plain human being of a father, a little richer than mine and so a little nearer opportunities for education? The claims to superiority of some of the titled people on the other side are silly enough when one examines them—the records of knavery and thievery and illegitimacy and insanity. But similar claims over here are laughable at a glance. The reason I hesitate to marry your daughter is not to her credit, or to her parents' credit—or to yours."

Madam Bowker was beside herself with rage at these candid insults, flung at her with all Craig's young energy and in his most effective manner; for his crudeness disappeared when he spoke thus, as the blackness and roughness of the coal vanish in the furnace heat, transforming it into beauty and grace of flames.

"Do I make myself clear?" demanded Craig, his eyes flashing superbly upon her.

"You certainly do," snapped the old lady, her dignity tottering and a very vulgar kind of human wrath showing uglily in her blazing eyes and twitching nose and mouth and fingers.

"Then let us have no more of this caste nonsense," said the young man. "Forbid your granddaughter to marry or to see me. Send or take her away. She will thank you a year from now. My thanks will begin from the moment of release."

"Yes, you have made yourself extremely clear," said Madam Bowker in a suffocating voice. To be thus defied, insulted, outraged, in her own magnificent salon, in her own magnificent presence! "You may be sure you will have no further opportunity to exploit your upstart insolence in my family. Any chance you may have had for the alliance you have so cunningly sought is at an end." And she waved her ebony scepter in dismissal, ringing the bell at the same time.

Craig drew himself up, bowed coldly and haughtily, made his exit in excellent style; no prince of the blood, bred to throne rooms, no teacher of etiquette in a fashionable boarding-school could have done better.

CHAPTER XIV

MAGGIE AND JOSH

Wrath is a baseless flame in the intelligent aged; also, Margaret's grandmother was something more than a mere expert in social craft, would have been woman of the world had not circumstances compressed her to its petty department of fashionable society. Before Craig had cleared the front door she was respecting him, even as she raged against him. Insolent, impudent, coarsely insulting—yes, all these. But very much a man, a masculine force; with weaknesses, it was true, and his full measure of the low-sprung's obsequious snobbishness; but, for all that, strong, persistent, concentrated, one who knew the master-art of making his weaknesses serve as pitfalls into which his enemies were lured, to fall victim to his strength.

"Yes, he will arrive," reflected Madam Bowker. "Branch will yet have to serve him. Poor Branch! What a misery for a man to be born with a master's mind but with the lack of will and courage that keeps a man a servant. Yes, Craig will arrive!... What a pity he has no money."

But, on second thought, that seemed less a disadvantage. If she should let him marry Margaret they would be dependent upon her; she could control them—him—through holding the purse strings. And when that remote time came at which it would please God to call her from her earthly labors to their eternal reward, she could transfer the control to Margaret. "Men of his origin are always weak on the social side," she reflected. "And it wouldn't be in nature for a person as grasping of power as he is not to be eager about money also."

With the advent of plutocratic fashion respect for official position had dwindled at Washington. In Rome in the days when the imperators became mere creatures of the army, the seat of fashion and of power was transferred to the old and rich families aloof from the government and buying peace and privilege from it. So Washington's fashionable society has come to realize, even more clearly than does the rest of the country, that, despite spasmodic struggles and apparent spurts of reaction, power has passed to the plutocracy, and that officialdom is, as a rule, servant verging toward slave. Still, form is a delusion of tenacious hold upon the human mind. The old lady's discoveries of Craig's political prospects did not warm her toward him as would news that he was in the way of being vastly rich; but she retained enough of the fading respect for high-titled office to feel that he was not the quite impossibility she had fancied, but was fit to be an aspirant for an aristocratic alliance.

"If Margaret doesn't fall in love with him after she marries him," reflected she, "all may be well. Of course, if she does she'll probably ruin him and herself, too. But I think she'll have enough sense of her position, of how to maintain it for herself, and for him and her children, not to be a fool."

Meanwhile Craig was also cooling down. He had meant every word he said—while he was saying it. Only one self-convinced could have been so effective. But, sobering off from his rhetorical debauch in the quiet streets of that majestic quarter, he began to feel that he had gone farther, much farther, than he intended.

"I don't see how, in self-respect, I could have said less," thought he. "And surely the old woman isn't so lost to decency that she can't appreciate and admire self-respect."

Still he might have spoken less harshly; might have been a little considerate of the fact that he was not making a stump speech, but was in the drawing-room of a high-born, high-bred lady. "And gad, she IS a patrician!"

His eyes were surveying the splendid mansions round about—the beautiful window-gardens—the curtains at the windows, which he had learned were real lace, whatever that might be, and most expensive. Very fine, that way of living! Very comfortable, to have servants at beck and call, and most satisfactory to the craving for power—trifles, it is true, but still the substantial and tangible evidence of power. "And it impresses the people, too. We're all snobs at bottom. We're not yet developed enough to appreciate such a lofty abstraction as democracy."

True, Margaret was not rich; but the old grandmother was. Doubtless, if he managed her right, she would see to it that he and Margaret had some such luxury as these grandly-housed people—"but not too much, for that would interfere with my political program." He did not protest this positively; the program seemed, for the moment, rather vague and not very attractive. The main point seemed to be money and the right sort of position among the right sort of people. He shook himself, scowled, muttered: "I am a damn fool! What do _I_ amount to except as I rise in politics and stay risen? I must be mighty careful or I'll lose my point of view and become a wretched hanger-on at the skirts of these fakers. For they are fakers—frauds of the first water! Take their accidental money away from them and they'd sink to be day laborers, most of them—and not of much account there."

He was sorely perplexed; he did not know what to do—what he ought to do—even what he wanted to do. One thing seemed clear—that he had gone further than was necessary in antagonizing the old woman. Whether he wanted to marry the girl or not, he certainly did not wish, at this stage of the game, to make it impossible. The wise plan was to leave the situation open in every direction, so that he could freely advance or freely retreat as unfolding events might dictate. So he turned in the direction of the Severence house, walked at his usual tearing pace, arrived there somewhat wilted of collar and exceedingly dusty of shoe and trouser-leg.

Greater physical contrast could hardly have been than that between him and Margaret, descending to him in the cool garden where he was mopping himself and dusting his shoes, all with the same handkerchief. She was in a graceful walking costume of pale blue, scrupulously neat, perfect to the smallest detail. As she advanced she observed him with eyes that nothing escaped; and being in one of her exquisite moods, when the senses are equally quick to welcome the agreeable or to shrink from the disagreeable, she had a sense of physical repugnance. He saw her the instant she came out of the house. Her dress, its harmony with her delicateness of feature and coloring, the gliding motion of her form combined to throw him instantly into a state of intoxication. He rushed toward her; she halted, shivered, shrank. "Don't—look at me like that!" she exclaimed half under her breath.

"And why not? Aren't you mine?" And he seized her, enwrapped her in his arms, pressed his lips firmly upon her hair, her cheek—upon her lips. There he lingered; her eyes closed, her form, he felt, was yielding within his embrace as though she were about to faint.

"Don't—please," she murmured, when he let her catch her breath. "I—I—can't bear it."

"Do you love me?" he cried passionately.

"Let me go!" She struggled futilely in his plowman arms.

"Say you love me!"

"If you don't let me go I shall hate you!"

"I see I shall have to kiss you until you do love me."

"Yes—yes—whatever you wish me to say," she cried, suddenly freeing herself by dodging most undignifiedly out of his arms.

She stood a little way from him, panting, as was he. She frowned fiercely, then her eyes softened, became tender—just why she could not have explained. "What a dirty boy it is!" she said softly. "Go into the house and ask Williams to take you where you can make yourself presentable."

"Not I," said he, dropping into a seat. "Come, sit here beside me."

She laughed; obeyed. She even made several light passes at his wet mop of hair. She wondered why it was that she liked to touch him, where a few minutes before she had shrunk from it.

"I've just been down telling that old grandmother of yours what I thought of her," said he.

She startled. "How did you happen to go there?" she exclaimed. She forgot herself so completely that she added imperiously: "I wanted you to keep away from her until I was ready for you to go."

"She sent for me," apologized he. "I went. We came together with a bang. She told me I wanted to marry you; I told her YOU wanted to marry ME. She told me I was low; I told her she was a fraud. She said I was insolent; I said good-afternoon. If I hadn't marched out rather quickly I guess she'd have had me thrown out."

Margaret was sitting stone-still, her hands limp in her lap.

"So you see it's all up," continued he, with a curious air of bravado, patently insincere. "And it's just as well. You oughtn't to marry me. It's a crime for me to have permitted things to go this far."

"Perhaps you are right," replied she slowly and thoughtfully. "Perhaps you are right."

He made one of his exclamatory gestures, a swift jerk around of the head toward her. He had all he could do to restrain himself from protesting, without regard to his pretenses to himself and to her. "Do you mean that, Maggie?" he asked with more appeal in his voice than he was conscious of.

"Never call me that again!" she cried. "It's detestable—so common!"

He drew back as if she had struck him. "I beg your pardon," he said with gentle dignity. "I shall not do it again. Maggie was my mother's name—what she was always called at home."

She turned her eyes toward him with a kind of horror in them. "Oh, forgive me!" she begged, her clasped hands upon his arm. "I didn't mean it at all—not at all. It is I that am detestable and common. I spoke that way because I was irritated about something else." She laid one hand caressingly against his cheek. "You must always call me Maggie—when—when "—very softly—"you love me very, very much. I like you to have a name for me that nobody else has."

He seized her hands. "You DO care for me, don't you?" he cried.

She hesitated. "I don't quite know," said she. Then, less seriously: "Not at all, I'm sure, when you talk of breaking the engagement. I WISH you hadn't seen grandmother!"

"I wish so, too," confessed he. "I made an ass of myself."

She glanced at him quickly. "Why do you say that?"

"I don't know," he stammered confusedly. How could he tell her?

"A moment ago you seemed well pleased with what you'd done."

"Well, I guess I went too far. I wasn't very polite."

"You never are."

"I'm going to try to do better.... No, I don't think it would be wise for me to go and apologize to her."

She was looking at him strangely. "Why are you so anxious to conciliate her?"

He saw what a break he had made, became all at once red and inarticulate.

"What is she to you?" persisted the girl.

"Nothing at all," he blustered. "I don't care—THAT"—he snapped his fingers—"for her opinion. I don't care if everybody in the world is against our marrying. I want just you—only you."

"Obviously," said she with a dry laugh that was highly disconcerting to him. "I certainly have no fortune—or hope of one, so far as I know."

This so astounded, so disconcerted him that he forgot to conceal it. "Why, I thought—your grandmother—that is—" He was remembering, was stammering, was unable to finish.

"Go on," she urged, obviously enjoying his hot confusion.

He became suddenly angry. "Look here, Margaret," he cried, "you don't suspect me of—"

She put her fingers on his lips and laughed quietly at him. "You'd better run along now. I'm going to hurry away to grandmother, to try to repair the damage you did." She rose and called, "Lucia! Lucia!" The round, rosy, rather slovenly Miss Severence appeared in the little balcony—the only part of the house in view from where they sat.

"Telephone the stables for the small victoria," called Margaret.

"Mother's out in it," replied Lucia.

"Then the small brougham."

"I want that. Why don't you take the electric?"

"All right."

Lucia disappeared. Margaret turned upon the deeply-impressed Craig. "What's the matter?" asked she, though she knew.

"I can't get used to this carriage business," said he. "I don't like it. Where the private carriage begins just there

democracy ends. It is the parting of the ways. People who are driving have to look down; people who aren't have to look up."

"Nonsense!" said Margaret, though it seemed to her to be the truth.

"Nonsense, of course," retorted Craig. "But nonsense rules the world." He caught her roughly by the arm. "I warn you now, when we—"

"Run along, Josh," cried she, extricating herself and laughing, and with a wave of the hand she vanished into the shrubbery. As soon as she was beyond the danger of having to continue that curious conversation she walked less rapidly. "I wonder what he really thinks," she said to herself. "I wonder what I really think. I suspect we'd both be amazed at ourselves and at each other if we knew."

Arrived at her grandmother's she had one more and huger cause for wonder. There were a dozen people in the big salon, the old lady presiding at the tea-table in high good humor. "Ah—here you are, Margaret," cried she. "Why didn't you bring your young man?"

"He's too busy for frivolity," replied Margaret.

"I saw him this afternoon," continued Madam Bowker, talking aside to her alone when the ripples from the new stone in the pond had died away. "He's what they call a pretty rough customer. But he has his good points."

"You liked him better?" said the astonished Margaret.

"I disliked him less," corrected the old lady. "He's not a man any one"—this with emphasis and a sharp glance at her granddaughter—"likes. He neither likes nor is liked. He's too much of an ambition for such petty things. People of purpose divide their fellows into two classes, the useful and the useless. They seek allies among the useful, they avoid the useless."

Margaret laughed.

"Why do you laugh, child? Because you don't believe it?"

Margaret sighed. "No, because I don't want to believe it."

CHAPTER XV

THE EMBASSY GARDEN PARTY

Craig dined at the Secretary of State's that night, and reveled in the marked consideration every one showed him. He knew it was not because of his political successes, present and impending; in the esteem of that fashionable company his success with Margaret overtopped them. And while he was there, drinking more than was good for him and sharing in the general self-complacence, he thought so himself. But waking up about three in the morning, with an aching head and in the depths of the blues, the whole business took on again its grimmest complexion. "I'll talk it over again with Grant," he decided, and was at the Arkwright house a few minutes after eight.

It so happened that Grant himself was wakeful that morning and had got up about half-past seven. When Craig came he was letting his valet dress him. He sent for Craig to come up to his dressing-room. "You can talk to me while Walter shaves me," said Grant from the armchair before his dressing table. He was spread out luxuriously and Josh watched the process of shaving as if he had never seen it before. Indeed, he never had seen a shave in such pomp and circumstance of silver and gold, of ivory and cut glass, of essence and powder.

"That's a very ladylike performance for two men to be engaged in," said he.

"It's damn comfortable," answered Grant lazily.

"Where did you get that thing you've got on?"

"This gown? Oh, Paris. I get all my things of that sort there. Latterly I get my clothes there, too."

"I like that thing," said Craig, giving it a patronizing jerk of his head. "It looks cool and clean. Linen and silk, isn't it? Only I'd choose a more serviceable color than white. And I'd not have a pink silk lining and collar in any circumstances."

He wandered about the room.

"Goshalimity!" he exclaimed, peering into a drawer. "You must have a million neckties. And"—he was at the partly open door of a huge closet—"here's a whole roomful of shirts—and another of clothes." He wheeled abruptly upon the smiling, highly-flattered tenant of the armchair. "Grant, how many suits have you got?"

"Blest if I know. How many, Walter?"

"I really cannot say, sir. I know 'em all, but I never counted 'em. About seventy or eighty, I should say, not counting extra trousers."

Craig looked astounded. "And how many shirts, Walter?"

"Oh, several hundred of them, sir. Mr. Grant's most particular about his linen."

"And here are boots and shoes and pumps and gaiters and Lord knows what and what not—enough to stock a shoe-store. And umbrellas and canes—Good God, man! How do you carry all that stuff round on your mind?"

Grant laughed like a tickled infant. All this was as gratifying to his vanity as applause to Craig's. "Walter looks after it," said he.

Craig lapsed into silence, stared moodily out of the window. The idea of his thinking of marrying a girl of Grant's class! What a ridiculous, loutish figure he would cut in her eyes! Why, not only did he not have the articles necessary to a gentleman's wardrobe, he did not even know the names of them, nor their uses! It was all very well to pretend that these matters were petty. In a sense they were. But that sort of trifles played a most important part in life as it was led by Margaret Severence. She'd not think them trifles. She was probably assuming that, while he was not quite up to the fashionable standard, still he had a gentleman's equipment of knowledge and of toilet articles. "She'd think me no better than a savage—and, damn it! I'm not much above the savage state, as far as this side of life is concerned."

Grant interrupted his mournful musings with: "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll have my bath."

And, Walter following, he went in at a door to the right, through which Craig had a glimpse of marble walls and floor, of various articles of more than Roman luxury. The moments dragged away until half an hour had passed.

"What the devil!" Josh called out. "What are you doing all this time?"

"Massage," responded Grant. "You can come in."

Craig entered the marble chamber, seated himself on a corner of the warmed marble couch on which Grant lay luxuriating in Walter's powerful massage. "Do you go through this thing often?" demanded he.

"Every morning—except when I'm roughing it. You ought to take massage, Josh. It's great for the skin."

Craig saw that it was. His own skin, aside from his hands and face, was fairly smooth and white; but it was like sandpaper, he thought, beside this firm, rosy covering of the elegant Arkwright's elegant body. "Get through here and send Walter away," he said harshly. "I want to talk to you. If you don't I'll burst out before him. I can't hold in any longer."

"Very well. That'll do, Walter," acquiesced Grant. "And please go and bring us some breakfast. I'll finish dressing afterward."

As soon as the door closed on the valet, Craig said, "Grant, I've got myself into a frightful mess. I want you to help me out of it."

Grant's eyes shifted. He put on his white silk pajamas, thrust his feet into slippers, tossed the silk-lined linen robe about his broad, too square shoulders, and led the way into the other room. Then he said: "Do you mean Margaret Severence?"

"That's it!" exclaimed Craig, pacing the floor. "I've gone and got myself engaged—"

"One minute," interrupted Arkwright in a voice so strange that Joshua paused and stared at him. "I can't talk to you about that."

"Why not?"

"For many reasons. The chief one—Fact is, Josh, I've acted like a howling skunk about you with her. I ran you down to her; tried to get her myself."

Craig waved his hand impatiently. "You didn't succeed, did you? And you're ashamed of it, aren't you? Well, if I wasted time going round apologizing for all the things I'd done that I'm ashamed of I'd have no time left to do decently. So that's out of the way. Now, help me."

"What a generous fellow you are!"

"Generous? Stuff! I need you. We're going to stay friends. You can do what you damn please—I'll like you just the same. I may swat you if you get in my way; but as soon as you were out of it—and that'd be mighty soon and sudden, Grant, old boy—why, I'd be friends again. Come, tell me how I'm to get clear of this engagement."

"I can't talk about it to you."

"Why not?"

"Because I love her."

Craig gasped: "Do you mean that?"

"I love her—as much as I'm capable of loving anybody. Didn't I tell you so?"

"I believe you did say something of the kind," admitted Craig. "But I was so full of my own affairs that I didn't pay much attention to it. Why don't you jump in and marry her?"

"She happens to prefer you."

"Yes, she does," said Craig with a complacence that roiled Arkwright. "I don't know what the poor girl sees in me, but she's just crazy about me."

"Don't be an ass, Josh!" cried Grant in a jealous fury.

Craig laughed pleasantly. "I'm stating simple facts." Then, with abrupt change to earnestness, "Do you suppose, if I were to break the engagement, she'd take it seriously to heart?"

"I fancy she could live through it if you could. She probably cares no more than you do."

"There's the worst of it. I want her, Grant. When I'm with her I can't tolerate the idea of giving her up. But how in the mischief can I marry HER? I'm too strong a dose for a frail, delicate little thing like her."

"She's as tall as you are. I've seen her play athletes to a standstill at tennis."

"But she's so refined, so—"

"Oh, fudge!" muttered Arkwright. Then louder: "Didn't I tell you not to talk to me about this business?"

"But I've got to do it," protested Craig. "You're the only one I can talk to—without being a cad."

Arkwright looked disgusted. "You love the girl," he said bitterly, "and she wants you. Marry her."

"But I haven't got the money."

Craig was out with the truth at last. "What would we live on? My salary is only seventy-five hundred dollars. If I get the Attorney-Generalship it'll be only eight thousand, and I've not got twenty thousand dollars besides. As long as I'm in politics I can't do anything at the law. All the clients that pay well are clients I'd not dare have anything to do with—I may have to prosecute them. Grant, I used to think Government salaries were too big, and I used to rave against office-holders fattening on the people. I was crazy. How's a man to marry a LADY and live like a GENTLEMAN on seven or eight thousand a year? It can't be done."

"And you used to rave against living like a gentleman," thrust Grant maliciously.

Craig reddened. "There it is!" he fairly shouted. "I'm going to the devil. I'm sacrificing all my principles. That's what this mixing with swell people and trying to marry a fashionable lady is doing for me!"

"You're broadening out, you mean. You're losing your taste for tommy-rot."

"Not at all," said Craig surlily and stubbornly. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to see the girl to-day and put the whole case before her. And I want you to back me up."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," cried Grant. "How can you ask such a thing of ME?"

"Yes, you must go with me to-day."

"I've got an engagement—garden-party at the British Embassy."

"Going there, are you?... Um!... Well, we'll see."

The breakfast came and Craig ate like a ditch-digger—his own breakfast and most of Grant's. Grant barely touched the food, lit a cigarette, sat regarding the full-mouthed Westerner gloomily. "What DID Margaret see in this man?" thought Grant. "True, she doesn't know him as well as I do; but she knows him well enough. Talk about women being refined! Why, they've got ostrich stomachs."

"Do you know, Grant," said Craig thickly, so stuffed was his mouth, "I think your refined women like men of my sort. I know I can't bear anything but refined women. Now, you—you've got an ostrich stomach. I've seen you quite pleased with women I'd not lay my finger on. Yet most people'd say you were more sensitive than I. Instead, you're much coarser—except about piffling, piddling, paltry non-essentials. You strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if Margaret had penetrated the fact that your coarseness is in-bred while mine is near surface. Women have a surprising way of getting at the bottom of things. I'm a good deal like a woman in that respect myself."

Grant thrust a cigar upon him, got him out of the room and on the way out of the house as quickly as possible. "Insufferable egotist!" he mumbled, by way of a parting kick. "Why do I like him? Damned if I believe I do!"

He did not dress until late that afternoon, but lay in his rooms, very low and miserable. When he issued forth it was to the garden-party—and immediately he ran into Margaret and Craig, apparently lying in wait for him. "Here he is!" exclaimed Josh, slapping him enthusiastically on the back. "Grant, Margaret wants to talk with you. I must run along." And before either could speak he had darted away, plowing his way rudely through the crowd.

Margaret and Grant watched his progress—she smiling, he surly and sneering. "Yet you like him," said Margaret.

"In a way, yes," conceded Arkwright. "He has a certain sort of magnetism." He pulled himself up short. "This morning," said he, "I apologized to him for my treachery; and here I am at it again."

"I don't mind," said Margaret. "It's quite harmless."

"That's it!" exclaimed Grant in gloomy triumph. "You can't care for me because you think me harmless."

"Well, aren't you?"

"Yes," he admitted, "I couldn't give anybody—at least, not a blase Washington society girl—anything approaching a sensation. I understand the mystery at last."

"Do you?" said Margaret, with a queer expression in her eyes. "I wish I did."

Grant reflected upon this, could make nothing of it. "I don't believe you're really in love with him," he finally said.

"Was that what you told him you wished to talk to me about?"

"I didn't tell him I wanted to talk with you," protested Grant. "He asked me to try to persuade you not to marry him."

"Well—persuade!"

"To explain how coarse he is."

"How coarse is he?"

"To dilate on the folly of your marrying a poor man with no money prospects."

"I'm content with his prospects—and with mine through him."

"Seven or eight thousand a year? Your dresses cost much more than that."

"No matter."

"You must be in love with him!"

"Women take strange fancies."

"What's the matter, Rita? What have you in the back of your mind?"

She looked straight at him. "Nothing about YOU. Not the faintest, little shadow of a regret." And her hazel eyes smiled mirth of the kind that is cruelest from woman to man.

"How exasperating you are!"

"Perhaps I've caught the habit from my man."

"Rita, you don't even like me any more."

"No—candidly—I don't."

"I deserve it."

"You do. I can never trust you again."

He shrugged his shoulders; but he could not pretend that he was indifferent. "It seems to me, if Josh forgave me you might."

"I do—forgive."

"But not even friendship?"

"Not EVEN friendship."

"You are hard."

"I am hard."

"Rita! For God's sake, don't marry that man! You don't love him—you know you don't. At times you feel you can hardly endure him. You'll be miserable—in every way. And I—At least I can give you material happiness."

She smiled—a cold, enigmatic smile that made her face seem her grandmother's own peering through a radiant mask of youth. She glanced away, around—"Ah! there are mamma and Augusta Burke." And she left him to join them.

He wandered out of the garden, through the thronged corridors, into the street, knocking against people, seeing no one, not heeding the frequent salutations. He went to the Wyandotte, to Craig's tawdry, dingy sitting-room, its disorder now apparently beyond possibility of righting. Craig, his coat and waistcoat off, his detachable cuffs on the floor, was burrowing into masses of huge law-books.

"Clear out," said he curtly; "I'm busy."

Grant plumped himself into a chair. "Josh," cried he desperately, "you must marry that girl. She's just the one for you. I love her, and her happiness is dear to me."

Craig gave him an amused look. "However did she persuade you to come here and say that?" he inquired.

"She didn't persuade me. She didn't mention it. All she said was that she had wiped me off the slate even as a friend."

Craig laughed uproariously. "THAT was how she did it—eh? She's a deep one."

"Josh," said Arkwright, "you need a wife, and she's it."

"Right you are," exclaimed Craig heartily. "I'm one of those surplus-steam persons—have to make an ass of myself constantly, indulging in the futility of blowing off steam. Oughtn't to do it publicly—creates false impression. Got to have a wife—no one else but a wife always available and bound to be discreet. Out with you. I'm too busy to talk—even about myself."

"You will marry her?"

"Like to see anybody try to stop me!"

He pulled Arkwright from the chair, thrust him into the hall, slammed the door. And Arkwright, in a more hopeful frame of mind, went home. "I'll do my best to get back her respect—and my own," said he. "I've been a dog, and she's giving me the whipping I deserve."

CHAPTER XVI

A FIGHT AND A FINISH

In his shrewd guess at Margaret's reason for dealing so summarily with Arkwright, Craig was mistaken, as the acutest of us usually are in attributing motives. He had slowly awakened to the fact that she was not a mere surface, but had also the third dimension—depth, which distinguishes persons from people. Whenever he tried to get at what she meant by studying what she did, he fell into the common error of judging her by himself, and of making no allowance for the sweeter and brighter side of human nature, which was so strong in her that, in happier circumstances, the other side would have been mere rudiment.

Her real reason for breaking with Grant was a desire to be wholly honorable with Craig. She resolved to burn her bridges toward Arkwright, to put him entirely out of her mind—as she had not done theretofore; for whenever she had grown weary of Craig's harping on her being the aggressor in the engagement and not himself, or whenever she had become irritated against him through his rasping mannerisms she had straightway begun to revolve Arkwright as a possible alternative. Craig's personality had such a strong effect on her, caused so many moods and reactions, that she was absolutely unable to tell what she really thought of him. Also, when she was so harassed by doubt as to whether the engagement would end in marriage or in a humiliation of jilting, when her whole mind was busy with the problem of angling him within the swoop of the matrimonial net, how was she to find leisure to examine her heart? Whether she wanted him or simply wanted a husband she could not have said.

She felt that his eccentric way of treating the engagement would justify her in keeping Arkwright in reserve. But she was finding that there were limits to her ability to endure her own self-contempt, and she sacrificed Grant to her outraged self-respect. Possibly she might have been less conscientious had she not come to look on Grant as an exceedingly pale and shadowy personality, a mere vague expression of well-bred amiability, male because trousered, identifiable chiefly by the dollar mark.

Her reward seemed immediate. There came a day when Craig was all devotion, was talking incessantly of their future, was never once doubtful or even low-spirited. It was simply a question of when they would marry—whether as soon as Stillwater fixed his date for retiring, or after Craig was installed. She had to listen patiently to hours on hours of discussion as to which would be the better time. She had to seem interested, though from the viewpoint of her private purposes nothing could have been less important. She had no intention of permitting him to waste his life and hers in the poverty and uncertainty of public office, struggling for the applause of mobs one despised as individuals and would not permit to cross one's threshold. But she had to let him talk on and on, and yet on. In due season, when she was ready to speak and he to hear, she would disclose to him the future she had mapped out for him, not before. He discoursed; she listened. At intervals he made love in his violent, terrifying way; she endured, now half-liking it, now half-hating it and him, but always enduring, passive, as became a modest, inexperienced maiden, and with never a suggestion of her real thoughts upon her surface.

It was the morning after one of these outbursts of his, one of unusual intensity, one that had so worn upon her nerves that, all but revolted by the sense of sick satiety, she had come perilously near to indulging herself in the too costly luxury of telling him precisely what she thought of him and his conduct. She was in bed, with the blinds just up, and the fair, early-summer world visioning itself to her sick heart like Paradise to the excluded Peri at its barred gate. "And if he had given me half a chance I'd have loved him," she was thinking. "I do believe in him, and admire his strength and his way of never accepting defeat. But how can I—how CAN I—when he makes me the victim of these ruffian moods of his? I almost think the Frenchman was right who said that every man ought to have two wives.... Not that at times he doesn't attract me that way. But because one likes champagne one does not wish it by the cask. A glass now and then, or a bottle—perhaps—" Aloud: "What is it, Selina?"

"A note for you, ma'am, from HIM. It's marked important and immediate. You told me not to disturb you with those marked important, nor with those marked immediate. But you didn't say what to do about those marked both."

"The same," said Margaret, stretching herself out at full length, and snuggling her head into the softness of her perfumed hair. "But now that you've brought it thus far, let me have it."

Selina laid it on the silk and swansdown quilt and departed. Margaret forgot that it was there in thinking about a new dress she was planning, an adaptation of a French model. As she turned herself it fell to the floor. She reached down, picked it up, opened it, read:

"It's no use. Fate's against us. I find the President is making my marriage the excuse for not appointing me. How lucky we did not announce the engagement. This is a final good-by. I shall keep out of your way. It's useless for you to protest. I am doing what is best for us both. Thank me, and forget me."

She leaped from the bed with one bound, and, bare of foot and in her nightgown only, rushed to the telephone. She called up the Arkwrights, asked for Grant. "Wake him," she said. "If he is still in bed tell him Miss Severence wishes to speak to him at once."

Within a moment Grant's agitated voice was coming over the wire: "Is that you, Rita? What is the matter?"

"Come out here as soon as you can. How long will it be?"

"An hour. I really must shave."

"In an hour, then. Good-by."

Before the end of the hour she was pacing her favorite walk in the garden, impatiently watching the point where he would appear. At sight of her face he almost broke into a run. "What is it, Margaret?" he cried.

"What have you been saying to Josh Craig?" she demanded.

"Nothing, I swear. I've been keeping out of his way. He came to see me this morning—called me a dozen times on the telephone, too. But I refused him."

She reflected. "I want you to go and bring him here," she said presently. "No matter what he says, bring him."

"When?"

"Right away."

"If I have to use force." And Grant hastened away.

Hardly had he gone when Williams appeared, carrying a huge basket of orchids. "They just came, ma'am. I thought you'd like to see them."

"From Mr. Arkwright?"

"No, ma'am; Mr. Craig."

"Craig?" ejaculated Margaret.

"Yes, Miss Rita."

"Craig," repeated Margaret, but in a very different tone—a tone of immense satisfaction and relief. She waved her hand with a smile of amused disdain. "Take them into the house, but not to my room. Put them in Miss Lucia's sitting-room."

Williams had just gone when into the walk rushed Grant and Craig. Their faces were so flurried, so full of tragic anxiety that Margaret, stopping short, laughed out loud. "You two look as if you had come to view the corpse."

"I passed Craig on his way here," explained Grant, "and took him into my machine."

"I was not on my way here," replied Josh loftily. "I was merely taking a walk. He asked me to get in and brought me here in spite of my protests."

"You were on the road that leads here," insisted Arkwright with much heat.

"I repeat I was simply taking a walk," insisted Craig. He had not once looked at Margaret.

"No matter," said Margaret in her calm, distant way. "You may take him away, Grant. And"—here she suddenly looked at Craig, a cold, haughty glance that seemed to tear open an abysmal gulf between them—"I do not wish to see you again. I am done with you. I have been on the verge of telling you so many times of late."

"Is THAT what you sent Grant after me to tell me?"

"No," answered she. "I sent him on an impulse to save the engagement. But while he was gone it suddenly came over me that you were right—entirely right. I accept your decision. You're afraid to marry me because of your political future. I'm afraid to marry you because of my stomach. You—nauseate me. I've been under some kind of hideous spell. I'm free of it now. I see you as you are. I am ashamed of myself."

"I thought so! I knew it would come!" exclaimed Arkwright triumphantly.

Craig, who had been standing like a stock, suddenly sprang into action. He seized Arkwright by the throat and bore him to the ground. "I've got to kill something," he yelled. "Why not you?"

This unexpected and vulgar happening completely upset Margaret's pride and demolished her dignified pose. She gazed in horror at the two men struggling, brute-like, upon the grass. Her refined education had made no provision for such an emergency. She rushed forward, seized Craig by the shoulders. "Get up!" she cried contemptuously, and she dragged him to his feet. She shook him fiercely. "Now get out of here; and don't you dare come back!"

Craig laughed loudly. A shrewd onlooker might have suspected from his expression that he had deliberately created a diversion of confusion, and was congratulating himself upon its success. "Get out?" cried he. "Not I. I go where I please and stay as long as I please."

Arkwright was seated upon the grass, readjusting his collar and tie. "What a rotten coward you are!" he said to Craig, "to take me off guard like that."

"It WAS a low trick," admitted Josh, looking down at him genially. "But I'm so crazy I don't know what I'm doing."

"Oh, yes, you do; you wanted to show off," answered Grant.

But Craig had turned to Margaret again. "Read that," he commanded, and thrust a newspaper clipping into her hand. It was from one of the newspapers of his home town—a paper of his own party, but unfriendly to him. It read:

"Josh Craig's many friends here will be glad to hear that he is catching on down East. With his Government job as

a stepping-stone he has sprung into what he used to call plutocratic society in Washington, and is about to marry a young lady who is in the very front of the push. He will retire from politics, from head-hunting among the plutocrats, and will soon be a plutocrat and a palace-dweller himself. Success to you, Joshua. The 'pee-pul' have lost a friend—in the usual way. As for us, we've got the right to say, 'I told you so,' but we'll be good and refrain."

"The President handed me that last night," said Craig, when he saw that her glance was on the last line. "And he told me he had decided to ask Stillwater to stay on."

Margaret gave the clipping to Grant. "Give it to him," she said and started toward the house.

Craig sprang before her. "Margaret," he cried, "can you blame me?"

"No," said she, and there was no pose in her manner now; it was sincerely human. "I pity you." She waved him out of her path and, with head bent, he obeyed her.

The two men gazed after her. Arkwright was first to speak: "Well, you've got what you wanted."

Craig slowly lifted his circled, bloodshot eyes to Arkwright. "Yes," said he hoarsely, "I've got what I wanted."

"Not exactly in the way a gentleman would like to get it," pursued Grant. "But YOU don't mind a trifle of that sort."

"No," said Craig, "I don't mind a trifle of that sort. 'Bounder Josh'—that's what they call me, isn't it?"

"When they're frank they do."

Craig drew a long breath, shook himself like a man gathering himself together after a stunning blow. He reflected a moment. "Come along, Grant. I'm going back in your machine."

"The driver'll take you," replied Arkwright stiffly. "I prefer to walk."

"Then we'll walk back together."

"We will not!" said Arkwright violently. "And after this morning the less you say to me the better pleased I'll be, and the less you'll impose upon the obligation I'm under to you for having saved my life once."

"You treacherous hound," said Craig pleasantly. "Where did you get the nerve to put on airs with me? What would you have done to her in the same circumstances? Why, you'd have sneaked and lied out of it. And you dare to scorn me because I've been frank and direct! Come! I'll give you another chance. Will you take me back to town in your machine?"

A pause, Craig's fierce gaze upon Grant, Grant's upon the ground. Then Grant mumbled surlily: "Come on."

When they were passing the front windows of the house Craig assumed that Margaret was hiding somewhere there, peering out at them. But he was wrong. She was in her room, was face down upon her bed, sobbing as if her first illusion had fallen, had dashed to pieces, crushing her heart under it.

CHAPTER XVII

A NIGHT MARCH

Arkwright saw no one but his valet-masseur for several days; on the left side of his throat the marks of Craig's fingers showed even above the tallest of his extremely tall collars. From the newspapers he gathered that Margaret had gone to New York on a shopping trip—had gone for a stay of two or three weeks. When the adventure in the garden was more than a week into the past, as he was coming home from a dinner toward midnight he jumped from his electric brougham into Craig's arms.

"At last!" exclaimed Josh, leading the way up the Arkwright steps and ringing the bell. Grant muttered a curse under his breath. When the man had opened the door, "Come in," continued Josh loudly and cheerily, leading the way into the house.

"You'd think it was his house, by gad!" muttered Grant.

"I've been walking up and down before the entrance for an hour. The butler asked me in, but I hate walls and roof. The open for me—the wide, wide open!"

"Not so loud," growled Arkwright. "The family's in bed. Wait till we get to my part of the house."

When they were there, with doors closed and the lights on, Craig exhaled his breath as noisily as a blown swimmer. "What a day! What a day!" he half-shouted, dropping on the divan and thrusting his feet into the rich and rather light upholstery of a near-by chair.

Grant eyed the feet gloomily. He was proud of his furniture and as careful of it as any old maid.

"Go ahead, change your clothes," cried Josh. "I told your motorman not to go away."

"What do you mean?" Arkwright demanded, his temper boiling at the rim of the pot.

"I told him before you got out. You see, we're going to New York to-night—or rather this morning. Train starts at one o'clock. I met old Roebuck at the White House to-night—found he was going by special train—asked him to take us."

"Not I," said Arkwright. "No New York for me. I'm busy to-morrow. Besides, I don't want to go."

"Of course you don't," laughed Craig, and Arkwright now noted that he was in the kind of dizzy spirits that most men can get only by drinking a very great deal indeed. "Of course you don't. No more do I. But I've got to go—and so have you."

"What for?"

"To help me get married."

Grant could only gape at him.

"Don't you know Margaret has gone to New York?"

"I saw it in the paper, but—"

"Now, don't go back a week to ancient history."

"I don't believe it," foamed Grant, so distracted that he sprang up and paced the floor, making wild gestures with his arms and head.

Craig watched, seemed hugely amused. "You'll see, about noon to-morrow. You've got to put in the morning shopping for me. I haven't got—You know what sort of a wardrobe mine is. Wardrobe? Hand satchel! Carpet-bag! Rag-bag! If I took off my shoes you'd see half the toes of one foot and all the heel of the other. And only my necktie holds this collar in place. Both buttonholes are gone. As for my underclothes—but I'll spare you these."

"Yes, do," said Grant with a vicious sneer.

"Now, you've got to buy me a complete outfit." Craig drew a roll of bills from his pocket, counted off several, threw them on the table. "There's four hundred dollars, all I can afford to waste at present. Make it go as far as you can. Get a few first-class things, the rest decent and substantial, but not showy. I'll pay for the suits I've got to get. They'll have to be ready-made—and very good ready-made ones a man can buy nowadays. We'll go to the tailor's first thing—about seven o'clock in the morning, which'll give him plenty of time for alterations."

"I won't!" exploded Grant, stopping his restless pacing and slamming himself on to a chair.

"Oh, yes, you will," asserted Craig, with absolute confidence. "You're not going back on me."

"There's nothing in this—nothing! I've known Rita Severence nearly twenty years, and I know she's done with you."

Craig sprang to his feet, went over and laid his heavy hand heavily upon Arkwright's shoulder. "And," said he, "you know me. Did I ever say a thing that didn't prove to be true, no matter how improbable it seemed to you?"

Arkwright was silent.

"Grant," Craig went on, and his voice was gentle and moving, "I need you. I must have you. You won't fail me, will you, old pal?"

"Oh, hell!—I'll go," said Grant in a much-softened growl. "But I know it's a wild-goose chase. Still, you do need the clothes. You're a perfect disgrace."

Craig took away his hand and burst into his noisy, boyish laughter, so reminiscent of things rural and boorish, of the coarse, strong spirits of the happy-go-lucky, irresponsibles that work as field hands and wood-haulers. "By cracky, Grant, I just got sight of the remnants of that dig I gave you. It was a beauty, wasn't it?"

Arkwright moved uneasily, fumbled at his collar, tried to smile carelessly.

"I certainly am the luckiest devil," Craig went on. "Now, what a stroke pushing you over and throttling you was!" And he again laughed loudly.

"I don't follow you," said Grant sourly.

"What a vanity box you are! You can't take a joke. Now, they're always poking fun at me—pretty damn nasty! some of it—but don't I always look cheerful?"

"Oh—YOU!" exclaimed Grant in disgust.

"And do you know why?" demanded Craig, giving him a rousing slap on the knee. "When I find it hard to laugh I begin to think of the greatest joke of all—the joke I'll have on these merry boys when the cards are all played and I sweep the tables. I think of that, and, by gosh, I fairly roar!"

"Do you talk that way to convince yourself?"

Craig's eyes were suddenly shrewd. "Yes," said he, "and to convince you, and a lot of other weak-minded people who believe all they hear. You'll find out some day that the world thinks with its ears and its mouth, my boy. But, as I say, who but I could have tumbled into such luck as came quite accidentally out of that little 'rough-house' of mine at your expense?"

"Don't see it," said Grant.

"Why, can't you see that it puts you out of business with Margaret? She's not the sort of woman to take to the

fellow that shows he's the weaker."

"Well, I'll be—damned!" gasped Arkwright. "You HAVE got your nerve! To say such a thing to a man you've just asked a favor of."

"Not at all," cried Craig airily. "Facts are facts. Why deny them?"

Arkwright shrugged his shoulders. "Well, let it pass.... Whether it's settled me with her or not, it somehow—curiously enough—settled her with me. Do you know, Josh, I've had no use for her since. I can't explain it."

"Vanity," said Craig. "You are vain, like all people who don't talk about themselves. The whole human race is vain—individually and collectively. Now, if a man talks about himself as I do, why, his vanity froths away harmlessly. But you and your kind suffer from ingrowing vanity. You think of nothing but yourselves—how you look—how you feel—how you are impressing others—what you can get for yourself—self—self—self, day and night. You don't like Margaret any more because she saw you humiliated. Where would I be if I were like that? Why, I'd be dead or hiding in the brush; for I've had nothing but insults, humiliations, sneers, snubs, all my life. Crow's my steady diet, old pal. And I fatten and flourish on it."

Grant was laughing, with a choke in his throat. "Josh," said he, "you're either more or less than human."

"Both," said Craig. "Grant, we're wasting time. Walter!" That last in a stentorian shout.

The valet appeared. "Yes, Mr. Craig."

"Pack your friend Grant, here, for two days in New York. He's going to-night and—I guess you'd better come along."

Arkwright threw up his hands in a gesture of mock despair. "Do as he says, Walter. He's the boss."

"Now you're talking sense," said Craig. "Some day you'll stand before kings for this—or sit, as you please."

On their way out Josh fished from the darkness under the front stairs a tattered and battered suitcase and handed it to Walter. "It's my little all," he explained to Grant. "I've given up my rooms at the Wyandotte. They stored an old trunkful or so for me, and I've sent my books to the office."

"Look here, Josh," said Grant, when they were under way; "does Margaret know you're coming?"

"Does Margaret know I'm coming?" repeated Joshua mockingly. "Does Margaret know her own mind and me?... Before I forget it here's a list I wrote out against a lamp-post while I was waiting for you to come home. It's the things I must have, so far as I know. The frills and froth you know about—I don't."

CHAPTER XVIII

PEACE AT ANY PRICE

Miss Severance, stepping out of a Waldorf elevator at the main floor, shrank back wide-eyed. "You?" she gasped.

Before her, serene and smiling and inflexible, was Craig. None of the suits he had bought at seven that morning was quite right for immediate use; so there he was in his old lounge suit, baggy at knees and elbows and liberally bestrewn with lint. Her glance fell from his mussy collar to his backwoodsman's hands, to his feet, so cheaply and shabbily shod; the shoes looked the worse for the elaborate gloss the ferry bootblack had put upon them. She advanced because she could not retreat; but never had she been so repelled.

She had come to New York to get away from him. When she entered the train she had flung him out of the window. "I WILL NOT think of him again," she had said to herself. But—Joshua Craig's was not the sort of personality that can be banished by an edict of will. She could think angrily of him, or disdainfully, or coldly, or pityingly—but think she must. And think she did. She told herself she despised him; and there came no echoing protest or denial from anywhere within her. She said she was done with him forever, and well done; her own answer to herself there was, that while she was probably the better off for having got out of the engagement, still it must be conceded that socially the manner of her getting out meant scandal, gossip, laughter at her. Her cheeks burned as her soul flamed.

"The vulgar boor!" she muttered.

Was ever woman so disgraced, and so unjustly? What had the gods against her, that they had thus abased her? How Washington would jeer! How her friends would sneer! What hope was there now of her ever getting a husband? She would be an object of pity and of scorn. It would take more courage than any of the men of her set had, to marry a woman rejected by such a creature—and in such circumstances!

"He has made everybody think I sought him. Now, he'll tell everybody that he had to break it off—that HE broke it off!"

She ground her teeth; she clenched her hands; she wept and moaned in the loneliness of her bed. She hated Craig; she hated the whole world; she loathed herself. And all the time she had to keep up appearances—for she had not dared tell her grandmother—had to listen while the old lady discussed the marriage as an event of the not remote

future.

Why had she not told her grandmother? Lack of courage; hope that something would happen to reveal the truth without her telling. HOPE that something would happen? No, fear. She did not dare look at the newspapers. But, whatever her reason, it was not any idea that possibly the engagement might be resumed. No, not that. "Horrible as I feel," thought she, "I am better off than in those weeks when that man was whirling me from one nightmare to another. The peace of desolation is better than that torture of doubt and repulsion. Whatever was I thinking of to engage myself to such a man? to think seriously of passing my life with him? Poor fool that I was, to rail against monotony, to sigh for sensations! Well, I have got them."

Day and night, almost without ceasing, her thoughts had boiled and bubbled on and on, like a geyser ever struggling for outlet and ever falling vainly back upon itself.

Now—here he was, greeting her at the elevator car, smiling and confident, as if nothing had happened. She did not deign even to stare at him, but, with eyes that seemed to be simply looking without seeing any especial object, she walked straight on. "I'm in luck," cried he, beside her. "I had only been walking up and down there by the elevators about twenty minutes."

She made no reply. At the door she said to the carriage-caller:

"A cab, please—no, a hansom."

The hansom drove up; its doors opened. Craig pushed aside the carriage man, lifted her in with a powerful upward swing of his arm against her elbow and side—so powerful that she fell into the seat, knocking her hat awry and loosening her veil from the brim so that it hung down distressfully across her eyes and nose. "Drive up Fifth Avenue to the Park," said Craig, seating himself beside her. "Now, please don't cry," he said to her.

"Cry?" she exclaimed. Her dry, burning eyes blazed at him.

"Your eyes were so bright," laughed he, "that I thought they were full of tears."

"If you are a gentleman you will leave this hansom at once."

"Don't talk nonsense," said he. "You know perfectly well I'll not leave. You know perfectly well I'll say what I've got to say to you, and that no power on earth can prevent me. That's why you didn't give way to your impulse to make a scene when I followed you into this trap."

She was busy with her hat and veil.

"Can I help you?" said he with a great show of politeness that was ridiculously out of harmony with him in every way. That, and the absurdity of Josh Craig, of all men, helping a woman in the delicate task of adjusting a hat and veil, struck her as so ludicrous that she laughed hysterically; her effort to make the laughter appear an outburst of derisive, withering scorn was not exactly a triumph.

"Well," she presently said, "what is it you wish to say? I have very little time."

He eyed her sharply. "You think you dislike me, don't you?" said he.

"I do," replied she, her tone as cutting as her words were curt.

"How little that amounts to! All human beings—Grant, you, I, all of us, everybody—are brimful of vanity. It slops over a little one way and we call it like. It slops over the other way and we call it dislike—hate—loathing—according to the size of the slop. Now, I'm not here to deal with vanity, but with good sense. Has it occurred to you in the last few days that you and I have got to get married, whether we will or no?"

"It has not," she cried with frantic fury of human being cornered by an ugly truth.

"Oh, yes, it has. For you are a sensible woman—entirely too sensible for a woman, unless she marries an unusual man like me."

"Is that a jest?" she inquired in feeble attempt at sarcasm.

"Don't you know I have no sense of humor? Would I do the things I do and carry them through if I had?"

In spite of herself she admired this penetration of self-analysis. In spite of herself the personality beneath his surface, the personality that had a certain uncanny charm for her, was subtly reasserting its inexplicable fascination.

"Yes, we've got to marry," proceeded he. "I have to marry you because I can't afford to let you say you jilted me. That would make me the laughing-stock of my State; and I can't afford to tell the truth that I jilted you because the people would despise me as no gentleman. And, while I don't in the least mind being despised as no gentleman by fashionable noddle-heads or by those I trample on to rise, I do mind it when it would ruin me with the people."

Her eyes gleamed. So! She had him at her mercy!

"Not so fast, young lady," continued he in answer to that gleam. "It is equally true that you've got to marry me."

"But I shall not!" she cried. "Besides, it isn't true."

"It IS true," replied he. "You may refuse to marry me, just as a man may refuse to run when the dynamite blast is going off. Yes, you can refuse, but—you'd not be your grandmother's granddaughter if you did."

"Really!" She was so surcharged with rage that she was shaking with it, was tearing up her handkerchief in her lap.

"Yes, indeed," he assured her, tranquil as a lawyer arguing a commercial case before a logic-machine of a judge.

"If you do not marry me all your friends will say I jilted you. I needn't tell you what it would mean in your set, what it would mean as to your matrimonial prospects, for you to have the reputation of having been turned down by me—need I?"

She was silent; her head down, her lips compressed, her fingers fiercely interlaced with the ruins of her handkerchief.

"It is necessary that you marry," said he summing up. "It is wisest and easiest to marry me, since I am willing. To refuse would be to inflict an irreparable injury upon yourself in order to justify a paltry whim for injuring me."

She laughed harshly. "You are frank," said she.

"I am paying you the compliment of frankness. I am appealing to your intelligence, where a less intelligent man and one that knew you less would try to gain his point by chicane, flattery, deception."

"Yes—it is a compliment," she answered. "It was stupid of me to sneer at your frankness."

A long silence. He lighted a cigarette, smoked it with deliberation foreign to his usual self but characteristic of him when he was closely and intensely engaged; for he was like a thoroughbred that is all fret and champ and pawing and caper until the race is on, when he at once settles down into a calm, steady stride, with all the surplus nervous energy applied directly and intelligently to the work in hand. She was not looking at him, but she was feeling him in every atom of her body, was feeling the power, the inevitableness of the man. He angered her, made her feel weak, a helpless thing, at his mercy. True, it was his logic that was convincing her, not his magnetic and masterful will; but somehow the two seemed one. Never had he been so repellent, never had she felt so hostile to him.

"I will marry you," she finally said. "But I must tell you that I do not love you—or even like you. The reverse."

His face, of the large, hewn features, with their somehow pathetic traces of the struggles and sorrows of his rise, grew strange, almost terrible. "Do you mean that?" he said, turning slowly toward her.

She quickly shifted her eyes, in which her dislike was showing, shifted them before he could possibly have seen. And she tried in vain to force past her lips the words which she believed to be the truth, the words his pathetic, powerful face told her would end everything. Yes, she knew he would not marry her if she told him the truth about her feelings.

"Do you mean that?" he repeated, stern and sharp, yet sad, wistfully sad, too.

"I don't know what I mean," she cried, desperately afraid of him, afraid of the visions the idea of not marrying him conjured. "I don't know what I mean," she repeated. "You fill me with a kind of—of—horror. You draw me into your grasp in spite of myself—like a whirlpool—and rouse all my instinct to try and save myself. Sometimes that desire becomes a positive frenzy."

He laughed complacently. "That is love," said he.

She did not resent his tone or dispute his verdict externally. "If it is love," replied she evenly, "then never did love wear so strange, so dreadful a disguise."

He laid his talon-hand, hardened and misshapen by manual labor, but if ugly, then ugly with the majesty of the twisted, tempest-defying oak, over hers. "Believe me, Margaret, you love me. You have loved me all along.... And I you."

"Don't deceive yourself," she felt bound to say, "I certainly do not love you if love has any of its generally accepted meanings."

"I am not the general sort of person," said he. "It is not strange that I should arouse extraordinary feelings, is it? Driver"—he had the trap in the roof up and was thrusting through it a slip of paper—"take us to that street and number."

She gasped with a tightening at the heart. "I must return to the hotel at once," she said hurriedly.

He fixed his gaze upon her. "We are going to the preacher's," said he.

"The preacher's?" she murmured, shrinking in terror.

"Grant is waiting for us there"—he glanced at his watch—"or, rather, will be there in about ten minutes. We are a little earlier than I anticipated."

She flushed crimson, paled, felt she would certainly suffocate with rage.

"Before you speak," continued he, "listen to me. You don't want to go back into that torment of doubt in which we've both been hopping about for a month, like a pair of damned souls being used as tennis balls by fiends. Let's settle the business now, and for good and all. Let us have peace—for God's sake, peace! I know you've been miserable. I know I've been on the rack. And it's got to stop. Am I not right?"

She leaned back in her corner of the cab, shut her eyes, said no more—and all but ceased to think. What was there to say? What was there to think? When Fate ceases to tolerate our pleasant delusion of free will, when it openly and firmly seizes us and hurries us along, we do not discuss or comment. We close our minds, relax and submit.

At the parsonage he sprang out, stood by to help her descend, half-dragged her from the cab when she hesitated. He shouted at the driver: "How much do I owe you, friend?"

"Six dollars, sir."

"Not on your life!" shouted Craig furiously. He turned to Margaret, standing beside him in a daze. "What do you

think of THAT! This fellow imagines because I've got a well-dressed woman along I'll submit. But I'm not that big a snob." He was looking up at the cabman again. "You miserable thief!" he exclaimed. "I'll give you three dollars, and that's too much by a dollar."

"Don't you call me names!" yelled the cabman, shaking his fist with the whip in it.

"The man's drunk," cried Josh to the little crowd of people that had assembled. Margaret, overwhelmed with mortification, tugged at his sleeve. "The man's not overcharging much—if any," she said in an undertone.

"You're saying that because you hate scenes," replied Josh loudly. "You go on into the house. I'll take care of this hound."

Margaret retreated within the parsonage gate; her very soul was sick. She longed for the ground to open and swallow her forever. It would be bad enough for a man to make such an exhibition at any time; but to make it when he was about to be married!—and in such circumstances!—to squabble and scream over a paltry dollar or so!

"Here's a policeman!" cried Craig. "Now, you thief, we'll see!"

The cabman sprang down from his seat. "You damn jay!" he bellowed. "You don't know New York cabfares. Was you ever to town before—eh?"

Craig beckoned the policeman with vast, excited gestures. Margaret fled up the walk toward the parsonage door, but not before she heard Craig say to the policeman:

"I am Joshua Craig, assistant to the Attorney-General of the United States. This thief here—" And so on until he had told the whole story. Margaret kept her back to the street, but she could hear the two fiercely-angry voices, the laughter of the crowd. At last Craig joined her—panting, flushed, triumphant. "I knew he was a thief. Four dollars was the right amount, but I gave him five, as the policeman said it was best to quiet him."

He gave a jerk at the knob of parsonage street bell as if he were determined to pull it out; the bell within rang loudly, angrily, like the infuriate voice of a sleeper who has been roused with a thundering kick. "This affair of ours," continued Craig, "is going to cost money. And I've been spending it to-day like a drunken sailor. The more careful I am, the less careful I will have to be, my dear."

The door opened—a maid, scowling, appeared.

"Come on," cried Joshua to Margaret. And he led the way, brushing the maid aside as she stood her ground, attitude belligerent, but expression perplexed. To her, as he passed, Craig said: "Tell Doctor Scones that Mr. Craig and the lady are here. Has Mr. Arkwright come?"

By this time he was in the parlor; a glance around and he burst out:

"Late, by jiminy! And I told him to be here ahead of time."

He darted to the window. "Ah! There he comes!" He wheeled upon Margaret just as she dropped, half-fainting, into a chair. "What's the matter, dear?" He leaped to her side. "No false emotions, please. If you could weather the real ones what's the use of getting up ladylike excitement over—"

"For God's sake!" exclaimed Margaret, "sit down and shut up! If you don't I shall scream—scream—SCREAM!"

The maid gaped first at one, then at the other, left them reluctantly to admit Arkwright. As she opened the door she had to draw back a little. There was Craig immediately behind her. He swept her aside, flung the door wide. "Come on! Hurry!" he cried to Grant. "We're waiting." And he seized him by the arm and thrust him into the parlor. At the same instant the preacher entered by another door. Craig's excitement, far from diminishing, grew wilder and wilder. The preacher thought him insane or drunk. Grant and Margaret tried in vain to calm him. Nothing would do but the ceremony instantly—and he had his way. Never was there a more undignified wedding. When the responses were all said and the marriage was a fact accomplished, so far as preacher could accomplish it, Craig seemed suddenly to subside.

"I should like to go into the next room for a moment," said the pallid and trembling Margaret.

"Certainly," said Doctor Scones sympathetically, and, with a fierce scowl at the groom, he accompanied the bride from the room.

"What a mess you have made!" exclaimed Arkwright indignantly. "You've been acting like a lunatic."

"It wasn't acting—altogether," laughed Josh, giving Grant one of those tremendous slaps on the back. "You see, it was wise to give her something else to think about so she couldn't possibly hesitate or bolt. So I just gave way to my natural feelings. It's a way I have in difficult situations."

Grant's expression as he looked at him was a mingling of admiration, fear and scorn. "You are full of those petty tricks," said he.

"Why petty? Is it petty to meet the requirements of a situation? The situation was petty—the trick had to be. Besides, I tell you, it wasn't a trick. If I hadn't given my nerves an outlet I might have balked or bolted myself. I didn't want to have to think any more than she."

"You mustn't say those things to me," objected his friend.

"Why not? What do I care what you or any one else thinks of ME? And what could you do except simply think? Old pal, you ought to learn not to judge me by the rules of your little puddle. It's a ridiculous habit." He leaped at the door where Margaret had disappeared and rapped on it fiercely.

"Yes—yes—I'm coming," responded a nervous, pleading, agitated voice; and the door opened and Margaret

appeared.

"What shall we do now?" she said to Craig. Grant saw, with an amazement he could scarcely conceal, that for the time, at least, she was quite subdued, would meekly submit to anything.

"Go to your grandmother," said Craig promptly. "You attend to the preacher, Grant. Twenty-five's enough to give him."

Margaret's cheeks flamed, her head bowed. Grant flushed in sympathy with her agony before this vulgarity. And a moment later he saw Margaret standing, drooping and resigned, at the curb, while Craig excitedly hailed a cab. "Poor girl!" he muttered, "living with that nightmare-in-breeches will surely kill her—so delicate, so refined, so sensitive!"

CHAPTER XIX

MADAM BOWKER'S BLESSING

"If you like I'll go up and tell your grandmother," said Craig, breaking the silence as they neared the hotel. But Margaret's brain had resumed its normal function, was making up for the time it had lost. With the shaking off of the daze had come amazement at finding herself married. In the same circumstances a man would have been incapacitated for action; Craig, who had been so reckless, so headlong a few minutes before, was now timid, irresolute, prey to alarms. But women, beneath the pose which man's resolute apotheosis of woman as the embodiment of unreasoning imagination has enforced upon them, are rarely so imaginative that the practical is wholly obscured. Margaret was accepting the situation, was planning soberly to turn it to the best advantage. Obviously, much hung upon this unconventional, this vulgarly-sensational marriage being diplomatically announced to the person from whom she expected to get an income of her own. "No," said she to Joshua, in response to his nervously-made offer. "You must wait down in the office while I tell her. At the proper time I'll send for you."

She spoke friendlily enough, with an inviting suggestion of their common interests. But Craig found it uncomfortable even to look at her. Now that the crisis was over his weaknesses were returning; he could not believe he had dared bear off this "delicate, refined creature," this woman whom "any one can see at a glance is a patrician of patricians." That kind of nervousness as quickly spreads through every part, moral, mental and physical, of a man not sure of himself as a fire through a haystack. He could not conceal his awe of her. She saw that something was wrong with him; being herself in no "patrician" mood, but, on the contrary, in a mood that was most humanly plebeian, she quite missed the cause of his clumsy embarrassment and constraint; she suspected a sudden physical ailment. "It'll be some time, I expect," said she. "Don't bother to hang around. I'll send a note to the desk, and you can inquire—say, in half an hour or so."

"Half an hour!" he cried in dismay. Whatever should he do with himself, alone with these returned terrors, and with no Margaret there to make him ashamed not to give braver battle to them.

"An hour, then."

She nodded, shook hands with a blush and a smile, not without its gleam of appreciation of the queerness of the situation. He lifted his hat, made a nervous, formal bow and turned away, though no car was there. As the elevator was starting up with her he came hurrying back.

"One moment," he said. "I quite forgot."

She joined him and they stood aside, in the shelter of a great wrap-rack. "You can tell your grandmother—it may help to smooth things over—that my appointment as Attorney-General will be announced day after to-morrow."

"Oh!" exclaimed she, her eyes lighting up.

He went on to explain. "As you know, the President didn't want to give it to me. But I succeeded in drawing him into a position where he either had to give it to me or seem to be retiring me because I had so vigorously attacked the big rascals he's suspected of being privately more than half in sympathy with."

"She'll be delighted!" exclaimed Margaret.

"And you?" he asked with awkward wistfulness.

"I?" said she blushing and dropping her glance. "Is it necessary for you to ask?"

She went back to the elevator still more out of humor with herself. She had begun their married life with what was very nearly a—well, it certainly was an evasion; for she cared nothing about his political career, so soon to end. However, she was glad of the appointment, because the news of it would be useful in calming and reconciling her grandmother. Just as her spirits began to rise it flashed into her mind: "Why, that's how it happens I'm married! If he hadn't been successful in getting the office he wouldn't have come.... He maneuvered the President into a position where he had to give him what he wanted. Then he came here and maneuvered me into a position where _I_ had to give him what he wanted. Always his 'game!' No sincerity or directness anywhere in him, and very little real courage." Here she stopped short in the full swing of pharisaism, smiled at herself in dismal self-mockery. "And what am _I_ doing? Playing MY 'game.' I'm on my way now to maneuver my grandmother. We are well suited—he and I. In

another walk of life we might have been a pair of swindlers, playing into each other's hands.... And yet I don't believe we're worse than most people. Why, most people do these things without a thought of their being—unprincipled. And, after all, I'm not harming anybody, am I? That is, anybody but myself."

She had her campaign carefully laid out; she had mapped it in the cab between the parsonage and the hotel. "Grandmother," she began as the old lady looked up with a frown because of her long, unexpected absence, "I must tell you that just before we left Washington Craig broke the engagement."

Madam Bowker half-started from her chair. "Broke the engagement!" she cried in dismay.

"Abruptly and, apparently, finally. I—I didn't dare tell you before."

She so longed for sympathy that she half-hoped the old lady would show signs of being touched by the plight which that situation meant. But no sign came. Instead, Madam Bowker pierced her with wrathful eyes and said in a furious voice: "This is frightful! And you have done nothing?" She struck the floor violently with her staff. "He must be brought to a sense of honor—of decency! He must! Do you hear? It was your fault, I am sure. If he does not marry you are ruined!"

"He came over this morning," pursued Margaret. "He wanted to marry me at once."

"You should have given him no chance to change his mind again," cried Madam Bowker. "What a trifler you are! No seriousness! Your intelligence all in the abstract; only folly and fritter for your own affairs. You should have given him no chance to change!"

Margaret closed in and struck home. "I didn't," said she tersely. "I married him."

The old lady stared. Then, as she realized how cleverly Margaret had trapped her, she smiled a grim smile of appreciation and forgiveness. "Come and kiss me," said she. "You will do something, now that you have a chance. No woman has a chance—no LADY—until she is a Mrs. It's the struggle to round that point that wrecks so many of them."

Margaret kissed her. "And," she went on, "he has been made Attorney-General."

Never, never had Margaret seen such unconcealed satisfaction in her grandmother's face. The stern, piercing eyes softened and beamed affection upon the girl; all the affection she had deemed it wise to show theretofore always was tempered with sternness. "What a pity he hasn't money," said she. "Still, it can be managed, after a fashion."

"We MUST have money," pursued the girl. "Life with him, without it, would be intolerable. Poor people are thrown so closely together. He is too much for my nerves—often."

"He's your property now," Madam Bowker reminded her. "You must not disparage your own property. Always remember that your husband is your property. Then your silly nerves will soon quiet down."

"We must have money," repeated Margaret. "A great deal of money."

"You know I can't give you a great deal," said the old lady apologetically. "I'll do my best.... Would you like to live with me?"

There was something so fantastic in the idea of Joshua Craig and Madam Bowker living under the same roof, and herself trying to live with them, that Margaret burst out laughing. The old lady frowned; then, appreciating the joke, she joined in. "You'll have to make up your mind to live very quietly. Politics doesn't pay well—not Craig's branch of it, except in honor. He will be very famous."

"Where?" retorted Margaret disdainfully. "Why, with a lot of people who aren't worth considering. No, I am going to take Joshua out of politics."

The old lady looked interest and inquiry.

"He has had several flattering offers to be counsel to big corporations. The things he has done against them have made them respect and want him. I'm going to get him to leave politics and practice law in New York. Lawyers there—the shrewd ones, like him—make fortunes. He can still speak occasionally and get all the applause he wants. Joshua loves applause."

The old lady was watching her narrowly.

"Don't you think I'm right, Grandma? I'm telling you because I want your opinion."

"Will he do it?"

Margaret laughed easily. "He's afraid of me. If I manage him well he'll do whatever I wish. I can make him realize he has no right to deprive myself and him of the advantages of my station."

"Um—um," said the old lady, half to herself. "Yes—yes—perhaps. Um—um—"

"He will be much more content once he's settled in the new line. Politics as an end is silly—what becomes of the men who stick to it? But politics as a means is sensible, and Joshua has got out of it about all he can get—about all he needs."

"He hopes to be President."

"So do thousands of other men. And even if he should get it how would we live—how would _I_ live—while we were waiting—and after it was over? I detest politics—all those vulgar people." Margaret made a disdainful mouth. "It isn't for our sort of people—except, perhaps, the diplomatic posts, and they, of course, go by 'pull' or purchase. I like the life I've led—the life you've led. You've made me luxurious and lazy, Grandma.... Rather than President I'd prefer him

to be ambassador to England, after a while, when we could afford it. We could have a great social career."

"You think you can manage him?" repeated Madam Bowker.

She had been simply listening, her thoughts not showing at the surface. Her tone was neither discouraging nor encouraging, merely interrogative. But Margaret scented a doubt. "Don't you think so?" she said a little less confidently.

"I don't know.... I don't know.... It will do no harm to try."

Margaret's expression was suddenly like a real face from which a mask has dropped. "I must do it, Grandma. If I don't I shall—I shall HATE him! I will not be his servant! When I think of the humiliations he has put upon me I—I almost hate him now!"

Madam Bowker was alarmed, but was too wise to show it. She laughed. "How seriously you take yourself, child," said she. "All that is very young and very theatrical. What do birth and breeding mean if not that one has the high courage to bear what is, after all, the lot of most women, and the high intelligence to use one's circumstances, whatever they may be, to accomplish one's ambitions? A lady cannot afford to despise her husband. A lady is, first of all, serene. You talk like a Craig rather than like a Severance. If he can taint you this soon how long will it be before you are at his level? How can you hope to bring him up to yours?"

Margaret's head was hanging.

"Never again let me hear you speak disrespectfully of your husband, my child," the old lady went on impressively. "And if you are wise you will no more permit yourself to harbor a disrespectful thought of him than you would permit yourself to wear unclean underclothes."

Margaret dropped down at her grandmother's knee, buried her face in her lap. "I don't believe I can ever love him," she murmured.

"So long as you believe that, you never can," said Madam Bowker; "and your married life will be a failure—as great a failure as mine was—as your mother's was. If I had only known what I know now—what I am telling you—" Madam Bowker paused, and there was a long silence in the room. "Your married life, my dear," she went on, "will be what you choose to make of it. You have a husband. Never let yourself indulge in silly repinings or ruinous longings. Make the best of what you have. Study your husband, not ungenerously and superciliously, but with eyes determined to see the virtues that can be developed, the faults that can be cured, and with eyes that will not linger on the faults that can't be cured. Make him your constant thought and care. Never forget that you belong to the superior sex."

"I don't feel that I do," said Margaret. "I can't help feeling women are inferior and wishing I'd been a man."

"That is because you do not think," replied Madam Bowker indulgently. "Children are the center of life—its purpose, its fulfillment. All normal men and women want children above everything else. Our only title to be here is as ancestors—to replace ourselves with wiser and better than we. That makes woman the superior of man; she alone has the power to give birth. Man instinctively knows this, and it is his fear of subjection to woman that makes him sneer at and fight against every effort to develop her intelligence and her independence. If you are a true woman, worthy of your race and of your breeding, you will never forget your superiority—or the duties it imposes on you—what you owe to your husband and to your children. You are a married woman now. Therefore you are free. Show that you deserve freedom and know how to use it."

Margaret listened to the old woman with a new respect for her—and for herself. "I'll try, Grandmother," she said soberly. "But—it won't be easy." A reflective silence, and she repeated, "No, not easy."

"Easier than to resist and repine and rage and hunt another man who, on close acquaintance, would prove even less satisfactory," replied her grandmother. "Easy—if you honestly try." She looked down at the girl with the sympathy that goes out to inexperience from those who have lived long and thoughtfully and have seen many a vast and fearful bogy loom and, on nearer view, fade into a mist of fancy. "Above all, child, don't waste your strength on imaginary griefs and woes—you'll have none left for the real trials."

Margaret had listened attentively; she would remember what the old lady had said—indeed, it would have been hard to forget words so direct and so impressively uttered. But at the moment they made small impression upon her. She thought her grandmother kindly but cold. In fact, the old lady was giving her as deep commiseration as her broader experience permitted in the circumstances, some such commiseration as one gives a child who sees measureless calamity in a rainy sky on a long-anticipated picnic morning.

CHAPTER XX

MR. CRAIG KISSES THE IDOL'S FOOT

Grant Arkwright reached the Waldorf a little less than an hour after he had seen the bride and groom drive away from Doctor Scones'. He found Craig pacing up and down before the desk, his agitation so obvious that the people about were all intensely and frankly interested. "You look as if you were going to draw a couple of guns in a minute or so and shoot up the house," said he, putting himself squarely before Josh and halting him.

"For God's sake, Grant," cried Joshua, "see how I'm sweating! Go upstairs—up to their suite, and find out what's the matter."

"Go yourself," retorted Grant.

Craig shook his head. He couldn't confess to Arkwright what was really agitating him, why he did not disregard Margaret's injunction.

"What're you afraid of?"

Josh scowled as Grant thus unconsciously scuffed the sore spot. "I'm not afraid!" he cried aggressively. "It's better that you should go. Don't haggle—go!"

As Grant could think of no reason why he shouldn't, and as he had the keenest curiosity to see how the "old tartar" was taking it, he went. Margaret's voice came in response to his knock. "Oh, it's you," said she in a tone of relief.

Her face was swollen and her eyes red. She looked anything but lovely. Grant, however, was instantly so moved that he did not notice her homeliness. Also, he was one of those unobservant people who, having once formed an impression of a person, do not revise it except under compulsion; his last observation of Margaret had resulted in an impression of good looks, exceptional charm. He bent upon her a look in which understanding sympathy was heavily alloyed with the longing of the covetous man in presence of his neighbor's desirable possessions. But he discreetly decided that he would not put into words—at least, not just yet—his sympathy with her for her dreadful, her tragic mistake. No, it would be more tactful as well as more discreet to pretend belief that her tears had been caused by her grandmother. He glanced round.

"Where's Madam Bowker?" inquired he. "Did she blow up and bolt?"

"Oh, no," answered Margaret, seating herself with a dreary sigh. "She's gone to her sitting-room to write with her own hand the announcement that's to be given out. She says the exact wording is very important."

"So it is," said Grant. "All that's said will take its color from the first news."

"No doubt." Margaret's tone was indifferent, absent.

Arkwright hesitated to introduce the painful subject, the husband; yet he had a certain malicious pleasure in doing it, too. "Josh wants to come up," said he. "He's down at the desk, champing and tramping and pawing holes in the floor." And he looked at her, to note the impression of this vivid, adroitly-reminiscent picture.

"Not yet," said Margaret curtly and coldly. All of a sudden she buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Rita—dear Rita!" exclaimed Grant, his own eyes wet, "I know just how you feel. Am I not suffering, too? I thought I didn't care, but I did—I do. Rita, it isn't too late yet—"

She straightened; dried her eyes. "Stop that, Grant!" she said peremptorily. "Stop it!"

His eyes sank. "I can't bear to see you suffer."

"You don't mean a word of what you've just said," she went on. "You are all upset, as I am. You are his friend and mine." Defiantly: "And I love him, and you know I do."

It was the tone of one giving another something that must be repeated by rote. "That's it," said he, somewhat sullenly, but with no hint of protest. "I'm all unstrung, like you, and like him."

"And you will forget that you saw me crying."

"I'll never think of it again."

"Now go and bring him, please."

He went quickly toward the door.

"Grant!" she cried. As he turned she rose, advanced with a friendly smile and put out her hand for his. "Thank you," she said. "You have shown yourself OUR best friend."

"I meant to be," he answered earnestly, as he pressed her hand. "When I pull myself together I think you'll realize I'm some decenter than I've seemed of late."

Madam Bowker came just as he returned with Craig. So all attention was concentrated upon the meeting of the two impossibilities. The old lady took her new relative's hand with a gracious, queenly smile—a smile that had the effect both of making him grateful and of keeping him "in his place." Said she, "I have been writing out the announcement."

"Thank you," was Joshua's eager, respectful reply.

She gave him the sheet of notepaper she was carrying in her left hand. It was her own private paper, heavy, quiet, rich, engraved with aristocratic simplicity, most elegant; and most elegant was the handwriting. "This," said she, "is to be given out in addition to the formal notice which Grant will send to the newspapers."

Craig read:

"Mrs. Bowker announces the marriage of her granddaughter, Margaret Severence, and Joshua Craig, of Wayne, Minnesota, and Washington, by the Reverend Doctor Scones, at the Waldorf, this morning. Only a few relatives and Mr. Craig's friend, Mr. Grant Arkwright, were present. The marriage occurred sooner than was expected, out of consideration for Mrs. Bowker, as she is very old, and wished it to take place before she left for her summer abroad."

Craig lifted to the old lady the admiring glance of a satisfied expert in public opinion. Their eyes met on an equality; for an instant he forgot that she figured in his imagination as anything more than a human being. "Splendid!" cried he, with hearty enthusiasm. "You have covered the case exactly. Grant, telephone for an Associated Press reporter and give him this."

"I'll copy it off for him," said Grant.

Madam Bowker and Craig exchanged amused glances. "You'll give it to him in Madam Bowker's handwriting," ordered Craig. "You told Scones to keep his mouth shut, when you paid him?"

The other three looked conscious, and Margaret reddened slightly at this coarse brusqueness of phrase. "Yes," said Grant. "He'll refuse to be interviewed. I'll go and attend to this."

"We're having a gala lunch, at once—in the apartment," said the old lady. "So, come back quickly."

When he was gone she said to the two: "And now what are your plans?"

"We have none," said Craig.

"I had thought—" began Margaret. She hesitated, colored, went on: "Grandmother, couldn't you get the Millicans' camp in the Adirondacks? I heard Mrs. Millican say yesterday they had got it all ready and had suddenly decided to go abroad instead."

"Certainly," said the old lady. "I'll telephone about it at once, and I'll ask the Millicans to lunch with us to-day."

She left them alone. Craig, eyeing his bride covertly, had a sense of her remoteness, her unattainability. He was like a man who, in an hour of rashness and vanity, has boasted that he can attain a certain mountain peak, and finds himself stalled at its very base. He decided that he must assert himself; he tried to nerve himself to seize her in his old precipitate, boisterous fashion. He found that he had neither the desire to do so nor the ability. He had never thought her so full of the lady's charm. That was just the trouble—the lady's charm, not the human being's; not the charm feminine for the male.

"I hope you'll be very patient with me," said she, with a wan smile. "I am far from well. I've been debating for several days whether or not to give up and send for the doctor."

He did not see her real motive in thus paving the way for the formation of the habit of separate lives; he eagerly believed her, was grateful to her, was glad she was ill. So quaint is the interweaving of thought, there flashed into his mind at that moment: "After all, I needn't have blown in so much money on trousseau. Maybe I can get 'em to take back those two suits of twenty-dollar pajamas. Grant went in too deep." This, because the money question was bothering him greatly, the situation that would arise when his savings should be gone; for now it seemed to him he would never have the courage to discuss money with her. If she could have looked in upon his thoughts she would have been well content; there was every indication of easy sailing for her scheme to reconstruct his career.

"When do you think of starting for the Adirondacks?" he asked, with a timidity of preliminary swallowing and blushing that made her turn away her face to hide her smile. How completely hers was the situation! She felt the first triumphant thrill of her new estate.

"To-night," she replied. "We can't put it off."

"No, we can't put it off," assented he, hesitation in his voice, gloom upon his brow. "Though," he added, "you don't look at all well." With an effort: "Margaret, are you glad—or sorry?"

"Glad," she answered in a firm, resolute tone. It became a little hard in its practicality as she added: "You were quite right. We took the only course."

"You asked me to be a little patient with you," he went on.

She trembled; her glance fluttered down.

"Well—I—I—you'll have to be a little patient with me, too." He was red with embarrassment. She looked so still and cold and repelling that he could hardly muster voice to go on: "You can't but know, in a general sort of way, that I'm uncouth, unaccustomed to the sort of thing you've had all your life. I'm going to do my best, Margaret. And if you'll help me, and be a little forbearing, I think—I hope—you'll soon find I'm—I'm—oh, you understand."

She had given a stealthy sigh of relief when she discovered that he was not making the protest she had feared. "Yes, I understand," replied she, her manner a gentle graciousness, which in some moods would have sent his pride flaring against the very heavens in angry scorn. But he thought her most sweet and considerate, and she softened toward him with pity. It was very, pleasant thus to be looked up to, and, being human, she felt anything but a lessened esteem for her qualities of delicateness and refinement, of patrician breeding, when she saw him thus on his knees before them. He had invited her to look down on him, and she was accepting an invitation which it is not in human nature to decline.

There was one subject she had always avoided with him—the subject of his family. He had not exactly avoided it, indeed, had spoken occasionally of his brothers and sisters, their wives and husbands, their children. But his reference to these humble persons, so far removed from the station to which he had ascended, had impressed her as being dragged in by the ears, as if he were forcing himself to pretend to himself and to her that he was not ashamed of them, when in reality he could not but be ashamed. She felt that now was the time to bring up this subject and dispose of it.

Said she graciously: "I'm sorry your father and mother aren't living. I'd like to have known them."

He grew red. He was seeing a tiny, unkempt cottage in the outskirts of Wayne, poor, even for that modest little town. He was seeing a bent, gaunt old laborer in jeans, smoking a pipe on the doorsill; he was seeing, in the kitchen-

dining-room-sitting-room-parlor, disclosed by the open door, a stout, aggressive-looking laborer's wife in faded calico, doing the few thick china dishes in dented dishpan on rickety old table. "Yes," said he, with not a trace of sincerity in his ashamed, constrained voice, "I wish so, too."

She understood; she felt sorry for him, proud of herself. Was it not fine and noble of her thus to condescend? "But there are your brothers and sisters," she went graciously on. "I must meet them some time." "Yes, some time," said he, laboriously pumping a thin, watery pretense of enthusiasm into his voice.

She had done her duty by his dreadful, impossible family. She passed glibly to other subjects. He was glad she had had the ladylike tact not to look at him during the episode; he wouldn't have liked any human being to see the look he knew his face was wearing.

In the press of agitating events, both forgot the incident—for the time.

CHAPTER XXI

A SWOOP AND A SCRATCH

When Molly Stillwater heard that Margaret and her "wild man" had gone into the woods for their honeymoon she said: "Rita's got to tame him and train him for human society. So she's taken him where there are no neighbors to hear him scream as—as—" Molly cast about in her stock of slang for a phrase that was vigorous enough—"as she 'puts the boots' to him."

It was a shrewd guess; Margaret had decided that she could do more toward "civilizing" him in those few first weeks and in solitude than in years of teaching at odd times. In China, at the marriage feast, the bride and the groom each struggle to be first to sit on the robe of the other; the idea is that the winner will thenceforth rule. As the Chinese have been many ages at the business of living, the custom should not be dismissed too summarily as mere vain and heathenish superstition. At any rate, Margaret had reasoned it out that she must get the advantage in the impending initial grapple and tussle of their individualities, or choose between slavery and divorce. With him handicapped by awe of her, by almost groveling respect for her ideas and feelings in all man and woman matters, domestic and social, it seemed to her that she could be worsted only by a miracle of stupidity on her part.

Never had he been so nearly "like an ordinary man—like a gentleman"—as when they set out for the Adirondacks. She could scarcely believe her own eyes, and she warmed to him and felt that she had been greatly overestimating her task. He had on one of the suits he had bought ready made that morning. It was of rough blue cloth—dark blue—most becoming and well draped to show to advantage his lithe, powerful frame, its sinews so much more manly-looking than the muscularity of artificially got protuberances usually seen in the prosperous classes in our Eastern cities. Grant had selected the suit, had selected all the suits, and had superintended the fittings. Grant had also selected the negligee shirt and the fashionable collar, and the bright, yet not gaudy, tie, and Grant had selected the shoes that made his feet look like feet; and Grant had conducted him to a proper barber, who had reduced the mop of hair to proportion and order, and had restored its natural color and look of vitality by a thorough shampooing. In brief, Grant had taken a gloomy pleasure in putting his successful rival through the machine of civilization and bringing him out a city man, agreeable to sight, smell and touch.

"Now," said he, when the process was finished, "for Heaven's sake try to keep yourself up to the mark. Take a cold bath every morning and a warm bath before dinner."

"I have been taking a cold bath every day since I got my private bathroom," said Joshua, with honest pride.

"Then you're just as dirty as the average Englishman. He takes a cold bath and fancies he's clean, when in fact he's only clean-looking. Cold water merely stimulates. It takes warm water and soap to keep a man clean."

"I'll bear that in mind," said Craig, with a docility that flattered Grant as kindly attentions from a fierce-looking dog flatter the timid stranger.

"And you must take care of your clothes, too," proceeded the arbiter elegantiarum. "Fold your trousers when you take them off, and have them pressed. Get your hair cut once a week—have a regular day for it. Trim your nails twice a week. I've got you a safety razor. Shave at least once a day—first thing after you get out of bed is the best time. And change your linen every day. Don't think because a shirt isn't downright dirty that you can pass it off for fresh."

"Just write those things down," said Josh. "And any others of the same kind you happen to think of. I hate to think what a state I'd be in if I hadn't you. Don't imagine I'm not appreciating the self-sacrifice."

Grant looked sheepish. But he felt that his shame was unwarranted, that he really deserved Craig's tactless praise. So he observed virtuously: "That's where we men are beyond the women. Now, if it were one woman fixing up another, the chances are a thousand to one she'd play the cat, and get clothes and give suggestions that'd mean ruin."

It may not speak well for Arkwright's capacity for emotion, but it certainly speaks well for his amiability and philanthropy that doing these things for Craig had so far enlisted him that he was almost as anxious as the fluttered and flustered bridegroom himself for the success of the adventure. He wished he could go along, in disguise, as a sort of valet and prime minister—to be ever near Josh to coach and advise and guide him. For it seemed to him that

success or failure in this honeymooning hung upon the success or failure of Craig in practising the precepts that for Grant and his kind take precedence of the moral code. He spent an earnest and exhausting hour in neatly and carefully writing out the instructions, as Craig had requested. He performed this service with a gravity that would move some people to the same sort of laughter and wonder that is excited by the human doings of a trained chimpanzee. But Craig—the wild man, the arch foe of effeteness, the apostle of the simple life of yarn sock and tallowed boot and homespun pants and hairy jaw—Craig accepted the service with heartfelt thanks in his shaking voice and moist eye.

Thus the opening of the honeymoon was most auspicious. Craig, too much in awe of Margaret to bother her, and busy about matters that concerned himself alone, was a model of caution, restraint and civility. Margaret, apparently calm, aloof and ladylike, was really watching his discreet conduct as a hawk watches a sheltered hen; she began to indulge in pleasant hopes that Joshua's wild days had come to an abrupt end. Why, he was even restrained in conversation; he did not interrupt her often, instantly apologized and forebore when he did; he poured out none of his wonted sophomoric diatribes, sometimes sensible, more often inane, as the prattle of a great man in his hour of relaxation is apt to be. She had to do most of the talking—and you may be sure that she directed her conversation to conveying under an appearance of lightness many valuable lessons in the true wisdom of life as it is revealed only to the fashionable idle. She was careful not to overdo, not to provoke, above all not to put him at his ease.

Her fiction of ill health, of threatened nervous prostration, also served to free her from an overdose of his society during the long and difficult days in that eventless solitude. He was all for arduous tramps through the woods, for excursions in canoe under the fierce sun. She insisted on his enjoying himself—"but I don't feel equal to any such exertion. I simply must rest and take care of myself." She was somewhat surprised at his simplicity in believing her health was anything but robust, when her appearance gave the lie direct to her hints and regrets. While he was off with one of the guides she stayed at camp, reading, working at herself with the aid of Selina, revolving and maturing her plans.

When she saw him she saw him at his best. He showed up especially well at swimming. She was a notable figure herself in bathing suit, and could swim in a nice, ladylike way; but he was a water creature—indeed, seemed more at home in the water than on land. She liked to watch his long, strong, narrow body cut the surface of the transparent lake with no loss of energy in splashing or display—as easy and swift as a fish. She began to fear she had made a mistake in selecting a place for her school for a husband, "He's in his element—this wilderness," thought she, "not mine. I'll take him back with everything still to be done."

And, worst of all, she found herself losing her sense of proportion, her respect for her fashionable idols. Those vast woods, that infinite summer sky—they were giving her a new and far from practical point of view—especially upon the petty trickeries and posturings of the ludicrously self-important human specks that crawl about upon the earth and hastily begin to act queer and absurd as soon as they come in sight of each other. She found herself rapidly developing that latent "sentimentality" which her grandmother had so often rebuked and warned her against—which Lucia had insisted was her real self. Her imagination beat the bars of the cage of convention in which she had imprisoned it, and cried out for free, large, natural emotions—those that make the blood leap and the flesh tingle, that put music in the voice and softness in the glance and the intense joy of life in the heart. And she began to revolve him before eyes that searched hopefully for possibilities of his giving her precisely what her nerves craved.

"It would be queer, wouldn't it," she mused—she was watching him swim—"if it should turn out that I had come up here to learn, instead of to teach?"

And he—In large presences he was always at his best—in the large situations of affairs, in these large, tranquillizing horizons of nature. He, too, began to forget that she was a refined, delicate, sensitive lady, with nerves that writhed under breaks in manners and could in no wise endure a slip in grammar, unless, of course, it was one of those indorsed by fashionable usage. His health came flooding and roaring back in its fullness; and day by day the difficulty of restraining himself from loud laughter and strong, plebeian action became more appalling to him. He would leave the camp, set off at a run as soon as he got safely out of sight; and, when he was sure of seclusion in distance, he would "cut loose"—yell and laugh and caper like a true madman; tear off his superfluous clothes, splash and thresh in some lonely lake like a baby whale that has not yet had the primary lessons in how to behave. When he returned to camp, subdued in manner, like a bad boy after recess, he was, in fact, not one bit subdued beneath the surface, but the more fractious for his outburst. Each day his animal spirits surged higher; each day her sway of awe and respect grew more precarious. She thought his increasing silence, his really ridiculous formality of politeness, his stammering and red-cheeked dread of intrusion meant a deepening of the sense of the social gulf that rolled between them. She recalled their conversation about his relatives. "Poor fellow!" thought she. "I suppose it's quite impossible for people of my sort to realize what a man of his birth and bringing up feels in circumstances like these." Little did she dream, in her exaltation of self-complacence and superiority, that the "poor fellow's" clumsy formalities were the thin cover for a tempest of wild-man's wild emotion.

Curiously, she "got on" his nerves before he on hers. It was through her habit of rising late and taking hours to dress. Part of his code of conduct—an interpolation of his own into the Arkwright manual for a honeymooning gentleman—was that he ought to wait until she was ready to breakfast, before breakfasting himself. Several mornings she heard tempestuous sounds round the camp for two hours before she emerged from her room. She knew these sounds came from him, though all was quiet as soon as she appeared; and she very soon thought out the reason for his uproar. Next, his anger could not subdue itself beyond surliness on her appearing, and the surliness lasted through the first part of breakfast. Finally, one morning she heard him calling her when she was about half-way through her leisurely toilette: "Margaret! MARGARET!"

"Yes—what is it?"

"Do come out. You're missing the best part of the day."

"All right—in a minute."

She continued with, if anything, a slackening of her exertions; she appeared about an hour after she had said "in a

minute." He was ready to speak, and speak sharply. But one glance at her, at the exquisite toilette—of the woods, yet of the civilization that dwells in palaces and reposes languidly upon the exertions of menials—at her cooling, subduing eyes, so graciously haughty—and he shut his lips together and subsided.

The next morning it was a knock at her door just as she was waking—or had it waked her? "Yes—what is it?"

"Do come out! I'm half starved."

The voice was pleading, not at all commanding, not at all the aggressive, dictatorial voice of the Josh Craig of less than a month before. But it was distinctly reminiscent of that Craig; it was plainly the first faint murmur, not of rebellion, but of the spirit of rebellion. Margaret retorted with an icily polite, "Please don't wait for me."

"Yes, I'll wait. But be as quick as you can."

Margaret neither hastened nor dallied. She came forth at the end of an hour and a half. Josh, to her surprise, greeted her as if she had not kept him waiting an instant; not a glance of sullenness, no suppressed irritation in his voice. Next morning the knock was a summons.

"Margaret! I say, Margaret!" came in tones made bold and fierce by hunger. "I've been waiting nearly two hours."

"For what?" inquired she frigidly from the other side of the door.

"For breakfast."

"Oh! Go ahead with it. I'm not even up yet."

"You've been shut in there ten hours."

"What of it?" retorted she sharply. "Go away, and don't bother me."

He had put her into such an ill humor that when she came out, two hours later, her stormy brow, her gleaming hazel eyes showed she was "looking for trouble." He was still breakfastless—he well knew how to manipulate his weaknesses so that his purposes could cow them, could even use them. He answered her lowering glance with a flash of his blue-green eyes like lightning from the dark head of a thunder-cloud. "Do you know it is nine o'clock?" demanded he.

"So early? I try to get up late so that the days won't seem so long."

He abandoned the field to her, and she thought him permanently beaten. She had yet to learn the depths of his sagacity that never gave battle until the time was auspicious.

Two mornings later he returned to the attack.

"I see your light burning every night until midnight," said he—at breakfast with her, after the usual wait.

"I read myself to sleep," explained she.

"Do you think that's good for you?"

"I don't notice any ill effects."

"You say your health doesn't improve as rapidly as you hoped."

Check! She reddened with guilt and exasperation. "What a sly trick!" thought she. She answered him with a cold: "I always have read myself to sleep, and I fancy I always shall."

"If you went to sleep earlier," observed he, his air unmistakably that of the victor conscious of victory, "you'd not keep me raging round two or three hours for breakfast."

"How often I've asked you not to wait for me! I prefer to breakfast alone, anyhow. It's the dreadful habit of breakfasting together that causes people to get on together so badly."

"I'd not feel right," said he, moderately, but firmly, "if I didn't see you at breakfast."

She sat silent—thinking. He felt what she was thinking—how common this was, how "middle class," how "bourgeois," she was calling it. "Bourgeois" was her favorite word for all that she objected to in him, for all she was trying to train out of him by what she regarded as most artistically indirect lessons. He felt that their talk about his family, what he had said, had shown he felt, was recurring to her. He grew red, burned with shame from head to foot.

"What a fool, what a pup I was!" he said to himself. "If she had been a real lady—no, by gad—a real WOMAN—she'd have shown that she despised me."

Again and again that incident had come back to him. It had been, perhaps, the most powerful factor in his patience with her airs and condescensions. He felt that it, the lowest dip of his degradation in snobism, had given her the right to keep him in his place. It seemed to him one of those frightful crimes against self-respect which can never be atoned, and, bad as he thought it from the standpoint of good sense as to the way to get on with her, he suffered far more because it was such a stinging, scoffing denial of all his pretenses of personal pride. "Her sensibilities have been too blunted by association with those Washington vulgarians," he reasoned, "for her to realize the enormity of my offense, but she realizes enough to look down at me more contemptuously every time she recalls it." However, the greater the blunder the greater the necessity of repairing. He resolutely thrust his self-abasing thoughts to the background of his mind, and began afresh.

"I'm sure," said he, "you'd not mind, once you got used to it."

She was startled out of her abstraction. "Used to—what?" she inquired.

"To getting up early."

"Oh!" She gave a relieved laugh. "Still harping on that. How persistent you are!"

"You could accomplish twice as much if you got up early and made a right start."

She frowned slightly. "Couldn't think of it," said she, in the tone of one whose forbearance is about at an end. "I hate the early morning."

"We usually hate what's best for us. But, if we're sensible, we do it until it becomes a habit that we don't mind—or positively like."

This philosophy of the indisputable and the sensible brimmed the measure. "What would you think of me," said she, in her pleasantest, most deliberately irritating way in the world, "if I were to insist that you get up late and breakfast late? You should learn to let live as well as to live. You are too fond of trying to compel everybody to do as you wish."

"I make 'em see that what I wish is what they ought. That's not compelling."

"It's even more unpopular."

"I'm not looking for popularity, but for success."

"Well, please don't annoy me in the mornings hereafter."

"You don't seem to realize you've renounced your foolish idlers and all their ways, and have joined the working classes." His good humor had come back with breakfast; he had finished two large trout, much bread and marmalade and coffee—and it had given her a pleasure that somehow seemed vulgar and forbidden to see him eat so vastly, with such obvious delight. As he made his jest about her entry into the working classes—she who suggested a queen bee, to employ the labors of a whole army of willing toilers, while she herself toiled not—he was tilted back at his ease, smoking a cigarette and watching the sunbeams sparkle in the waves of her black hair like jewels showered there. "You're surely quite well again," he went on, the trend of his thought so hidden that he did not see it himself.

"I don't feel especially well," said she, instantly on guard.

He laughed. "You'd not dare say that to yourself in the mirror. You have wonderful color. Your eyes—there never was anything so clear. You were always straight—that was one of the things I admired about you. But now, you seem to be straight without the slightest effort—the natural straightness of a sapling."

This was most agreeable, for she loved compliments, liked to discover that the charms which she herself saw in herself were really there. But encouraging such talk was not compatible with the course she had laid out for herself with him. She continued silent and cold.

"If you'd only go to sleep early, and get up early, and drop all that the railway train carried us away from, you'd be as happy as the birds and the deer and the fish."

"I shall not change my habits," said she tartly. "I hope you'll drop the subject."

He leaned across the table toward her, the same charm now in his face and in his voice that had drawn her when she first heard him in public speech. "Let's suppose I'm a woodchopper, and you are my wife. We've never been anywhere but just here. We're going to live here all our lives—just you and I—and no one else—and we don't want any one else. And we love each other—"

It was very alluring, but there was duty frowning upon her yielding senses. "Please don't let that smoke drift into my face," said she crossly. "It's choking me."

He flung away the cigarette. "Beg pardon," he muttered, between anger and humility. "Thought you didn't mind smoking."

She was ashamed of herself, and grew still angrier. "If you'd only think about some one beside yourself once in a while," said she. "You quite wear people out, with your everlasting thinking and talking about yourself."

"You'd better stop that midnight reading," flared he. "Your temper is going to the devil."

She rose with great dignity; with an expression that seemed to send him tumbling and her soaring she went into the house.

In some moods he would have lain where he fell for quite a while. But his mood of delight in her charms as a woman had completely eclipsed his deference for her charms as a lady. He hesitated only a second, then followed her, overtook her at the entrance to her room. She, hearing him coming, did not face about and put him back in his place with one haughty look. Instead, she in impulsive, most ill-timed panic, quickened her step. When the woman flees, the man, if there be any manhood in him, pursues. He caught her, held her fast.

"Let me go!" she cried, not with the compelling force of offended dignity, but with the hysterical ineffectiveness of terror. "You are rough. You hurt."

He laughed, turned her about in his arms until she was facing him. "The odor of those pines, out there," he said, "makes me drunk, and the odor of your hair makes me insane." And he was kissing her—those fierce, strong caresses that at once repelled and compelled her.

"I hate you!" she panted. "I hate you!"

"Oh, no, you don't," retorted he. "That isn't what's in your eyes." And he held her so tightly that she was almost

crying out with pain.

"Please—please!" she gasped. And she wrenched to free herself. One of his hands slipped, his nail tore a long gash in her neck; the blood spurted out, she gave a loud cry, an exaggerated cry—for the pain, somehow, had a certain pleasure in it. He released her, stared vacantly at the wound he had made. She rushed into her room, slammed the door and locked it.

"Margaret!" he implored.

She did not answer; he knew she would not. He sat miserably at her door for an hour, then wandered out into the woods, and stayed there until dinner-time.

When he came in she was sitting by the lake, reading a French novel. To him, who knew only his own language, there was something peculiarly refined and elegant about her ability at French; he thought, as did she, that she spoke French like a native, though, in fact, her accent was almost British, and her understanding of it was just about what can be expected in a person who has never made a thorough study of any language. As he advanced toward her she seemed unconscious of his presence. But she was seeing him distinctly, and so ludicrous a figure of shy and sheepish contrition was he making that she with difficulty restrained her laughter. He glanced guiltily at the long, red scratch on the pallid whiteness of her throat.

"I'm ashamed of myself," said he humbly. "I'm not fit to touch a person like you. I—I—"

She was not so mean as she had thought she would be. "It was nothing," said she pleasantly, if distantly. "Is dinner ready?"

Once more she had him where she wished—abject, apologetic, conscious of the high honor of merely being permitted to associate with her. She could relax and unbend again; she was safe from his cyclones.

CHAPTER XXII

GETTING ACQUAINTED

Her opportunity definitely to begin her campaign to lift him up out of politics finally came. She had been doing something in that direction almost every day. She must be careful not to alarm his vanity of being absolute master of his own destiny. The idea of leaving politics and practising law in New York, must seem to originate and to grow in his own brain; she would seem to be merely assenting. Also, it was a delicate matter because the basic reason for the change was money; and it was her cue as a lady, refined and sensitive and wholly free from sordidness, so to act that he would think her loftily indifferent to money. She had learned from dealing with her grandmother that the way to get the most money was by seeming ignorant of money values, a cover behind which she could shame Madam Bowker into giving a great deal more than she would have given on direct and specific demand. For instance, she could get more from the old lady than could her mother, who explained just what she wanted the money for and acted as if the giving were a great favor. No, she must never get with him on a footing where he could discuss money matters frankly with her; she must simply make him realize how attractive luxury was, how necessary it was to her, how confidently she looked to him to provide it, how blindly, in her ignorance of money and all sordid matters, she trusted to him to maintain her as a wife such as she must be maintained. She knew she did not understand him thoroughly—"we've been so differently brought up." But she felt that the kind of life that pleased her and dazzled him must be the kind he really wished to lead—and would see he wished to lead, once he extricated himself, with her adroit assistance, from the kind of life to which his vociferous pretenses had committed him.

Whether her subtleties in furtherance of creating a sane state of mind in him had penetrated to him, she could not tell. In the earliest step of their acquaintance she had studied him as a matrimonial possibility, after the habit of young women with each unattached man they add to their list of acquaintances. And she had then discovered that whenever he was seriously revolving any matter he never spoke of it; he would be voluble about everything and anything else under the sun, would seem to be unbosoming himself of his bottommost secret of thought and action, but would not let escape so much as the smallest hint of what was really engaging his whole mind. It was this discovery that had set her to disregarding his seeming of colossal, of fatuous egotism, and had started her toward an estimate of him wholly different from the current estimate. Now, was he thinking of their future, or was it some other matter that occupied his real mind while he talked on and on, usually of himself? She could not tell; she hoped it was, but she dared not try to find out.

They were at their mail, which one of the guides had just brought. He interrupted his reading to burst out: "How they do tempt a man! Now, there's"—and he struck the open letter in his hand with a flourishing, egotistic gesture—"an offer from the General Steel Company. They want me as their chief counsel at fifty thousand a year and the privilege of doing other work that doesn't conflict."

Fifty thousand a year! Margaret discreetly veiled her glistening eyes.

"It's the fourth offer of the same sort," he went on, "since we've been up here—since it was given out that I'd be Attorney-General as soon as old Stillwater retires. The people pay me seventy-five hundred a year. They take all my time. They make it impossible for me to do anything outside. They watch and suspect and grumble. And I could be making my two hundred thousand a year or more."

He was rattling on complacently, patting himself on the back, and, in his effort to pose as a marvel of patriotic self-sacrifice, carefully avoiding any suggestion that mere money seemed to him a very poor thing beside the honor of high office, the direction of great affairs, the flattering columns of newspaper praise and censure, the general agitation of eighty millions over him. "Sometimes I'm almost tempted to drop politics," he went on, "and go in for the spoils. What do you think?"

She was taken completely off guard. She hadn't the faintest notion that this was his way of getting at her real mind. But she was too feminine to walk straight into the trap. "I don't know," said she, with well-simulated indifference, as if her mind were more than half on her own letter. "I haven't given the matter any thought." Carelessly: "Where would we live if you accepted this offer?"

"New York, of course. You prefer Washington, don't you?"

"No, I believe I'd like New York better. I've a great many friends there. While there isn't such a variety of people, the really nice New Yorkers are the most attractive people in America. And one can live so well in New York."

"I'd sink into a forgotten obscurity," pursued the crafty Joshua. "I'd be nothing but a corporation lawyer, a well-paid fetch-and-carry for the rich thieves that huddle together there."

"Oh, you'd be famous wherever you are, I'm sure," replied she with judicious enthusiasm. "Besides, you'd have fame with the real people."

His head reared significantly. But, to draw her on, he said: "That's true. That's true," as if reflecting favorably.

"Yes, I think I'd like New York," continued she, all unsuspicious. "I don't care much for politics. I hate to think of a man of your abilities at the mercy of the mob. In New York you could make a really great career."

"Get rich—be right in the social swim—and you too," suggested he.

"It certainly is very satisfactory to feel one is of the best people. And I'm sure you'd not care to have me mix up with all sorts, as politicians' wives have to do."

He laughed at her—the loud, coarse Josh Craig outburst. "You're stark mad on the subject of class distinctions, aren't you?" said he. "You'll learn some day to look on that sort of thing as you would on an attempt to shovel highways and set up sign-posts in the open sea. Your kind of people are like the children that build forts out of sand at the seashore. Along comes a wave and washes it all away.... You'd be willing for me to abandon my career and become a rich nonentity in New York?"

His tone was distinctly offensive. "I don't look at it in that way," said she coldly. "Really, I care nothing about it." And she resumed the reading of her letter.

"Do you expect me to believe," demanded he, excited and angry—"do you expect me to believe you've not given the subject of our future a thought?"

She continued reading. Such a question in such a tone called for the rebuke of an ignoring silence. Also, deep down in her nature, down where the rock foundations of courage should have been but were not, there had begun an ominous trembling.

"You know what my salary is?"

"You just mentioned it."

"You know it's to be only five hundred dollars a year more after January?"

"I knew the Cabinet people got eight thousand." She was gazing dreamily out toward the purple horizon, seemed as far as its mountains from worldliness.

"Hadn't you thought out how we were to live on that sum? You are aware I've practically nothing but my salary."

"I suppose I ought to think of those things—ought to have thought of them," replied she with a vague, faint smile. "But really—well, we've been brought up rather carelessly—I suppose some people would call it badly—and—"

"You take me for a fool, don't you?" he interrupted roughly.

She elevated her eyebrows.

"I wish I had a quarter for every row between your people and your grandmother on the subject of money. I wish I had a dollar for every row you and she have had about it."

He again vented his boisterous laugh; her nerves had not been so rasped since her wedding day. "Come, Margaret," he went on, "I know you've been brought up differently from me. I know I seem vulgar to you in many ways. But because I show you I appreciate those differences, don't imagine I'm an utter ass. And I certainly should be if I didn't know that your people are human beings."

She looked guilty as well as angry now. She felt she had gone just the one short step too far in her aristocratic assumptions.

He went on in the tone of one who confidently expects that there will be no more nonsense: "When you married me you had some sort of idea how we'd live."

"I assumed you had thought out those things or you'd not have married me," cried she hotly. In spite of her warnings to herself she couldn't keep cool. His manner, his words were so inflammatory that she could not hold herself from jumping into the mud to do battle with him. She abandoned her one advantage—high ground; she descended to his level. "You knew the sort of woman I was," she pursued. "You undertook the responsibility. I

assume you are man enough to fulfill it."

He felt quite at home with her now. "And you?" rasped he. "What responsibility did YOU undertake?"

She caught her breath, flamed scarlet.

"Now let us hear what wife means in the dictionary of a lady. Come, let's hear it!"

She was silent.

"I'm not criticising," he went on; "I'm simply inquiring. What do you think it means to be a wife?"

Still she could think of no answer.

"It must mean something," urged he. "Tell me. I've got to learn some time, haven't I?"

"I think," said she, with a tranquil haughtiness which she hoped would carry off the weakness of the only reply she could get together on such short notice, "among our sort of people the wife is expected to attend to the social part of the life."

He waited for more—waited with an expression that suggested thirst. But no more came. "Is that all?" he inquired, and waited again—in vain. "Yes?... Well, tell me, where in thunder does the husband come in? He puts up the cash for the wife to spend in dressing and amusing herself—is that all?"

"It is generally assumed," said she, since she had to say something or let the case go against her by default, "that the social side of life can be very useful in furthering a man."

He vented a scornful sound that was like a hoot. "In furthering a lick-spittle—yes. But not a MAN!"

"Our ideas on some subjects are hopelessly apart."

She suddenly realized that this whole conversation had been deliberately planned by him; that he had, indeed, been debating within himself their future life, and that he had decided that the time was ripe for a frank talk with her. It angered her that she had not realized this sooner, that she had been drawn from her position, had been forced to discuss with him on his own terms and at his own time and in his own manner. She felt all the fiery indignation of the schemer who has been outwitted.

"Your tone," said she, all ice, "makes it impossible for a well-bred person to discuss with you. Let us talk of something else, or of nothing at all."

"No. Let's thresh it out now that we've begun. And do try to keep your temper. There's no reason for anger. We've got to go back to civilization. We've got to live after we get there. We want to live comfortably, as satisfactorily for both as our income permits. Now, what shall we do? How shall we invest our eight thousand a year—and whatever your grandmother allows you? I don't need much. I'll turn the salary over to you. You're entirely welcome to all there is above my board and clothes."

This sounded generous and, so, irritated Margaret the more. "You know very well we can't live like decent people on twelve or fifteen thousand a year in Washington."

"You knew that before you married me. What did you have in mind?"

Silence.

"Why do you find it difficult to be frank with me?"

His courteous, appealing tone and manner made it impossible to indulge in the lie direct or the lie evasive. She continued silent, raging inwardly against him for being so ungenerous, so ungentlemanly as to put her in such a pitiful posture, one vastly different from that she had prearranged for herself when "the proper time" came.

"You had something in mind," he persisted. "What is it?"

"Grandmother wishes us to live with her," she said with intent to flank.

"Would you like that?" he inquired; and her very heart seemed to stand still in horror at his tone. It was a tone that suggested that the idea was attractive!

She debated. He must be "bluffing"—he surely must. She rallied her courage and pushed on: "It's probably the best we can do in the circumstances. We'd have almost nothing left after we'd paid our rent if we set up for ourselves. Even if I were content to pinch and look a frump and never go out, you'd not tolerate it."

"Nothing could be more galling," said he, after reflecting, "than what people would say if we lived off your grandmother. No, going there is unthinkable. I like her, and we'd get on well together—"

Margaret laughed. "Like two cats drowning in a bag."

"Not at all," protested he sincerely. "Your grandmother and I understand each other—better than you and I—at least, better than you understand me. However, I'll not permit our being dependents of hers."

Margaret had a queer look. Was not her taking enough money from the old lady to pay all her personal expenses—was not that dependence?

"We'll return to that later," continued he, and she had an uncomfortable sense that he was answering her thought. "To go back to your idea in marrying me. You expected me to leave politics."

"Why do you think that?" exclaimed she.

"You told me."

"_I_!"

"You, yourself. Have you not said you could not live on what I get as a public man, and that if I were a gentleman I'd not expect you to?"

Margaret stared foolishly at this unescapable inference from her own statements and admissions during his cross-examination. She began to feel helpless in his hands—and began to respect him whom she could not fool.

"I know," he went on, "you're too intelligent not to have appreciated that either we must live on my salary or I must leave public life."

He laughed—a quiet, amused laugh, different from any she had ever heard from him. Evidently, Joshua Craig in intimacy was still another person from the several Joshua Craigs she already knew. "And," said he, in explanation of his laughter, "I thought you married me because I had political prospects. I fancied you had real ambition.... I might have known! According to the people of your set, to be in that set is to have achieved the summit of earthly ambition—to dress, to roll about in carriages, to go from one fussy house to another, from one showy entertainment to another, to eat stupid dinners, and caper or match picture cards afterward, to grin and chatter, to do nothing useful or even interesting—" He laughed again, one of his old-time, boisterous outbursts. But it seemed to her to fit in, to be the laughter of mountain and forest and infinity of space at her and her silly friends. "And you picture ME taking permanent part in that show, or toiling to find you the money to do it with. ME!... Merely because I've been, for a moment, somewhat bedazzled by its cheap glitter."

Margaret felt that he had torn off the mask and had revealed his true self. But greater than her interest in this new personality was her anger at having been deceived—self-deceived. "You asked me how I'd like to live," cried she, color high and eyes filled with tears of rage. "I answered your question, and you grow insulting."

"I'm doing the best I know how," said he.

After a moment she got herself under control. "Then," asked she, "what have you to propose?"

"I can't tell you just now," replied he, and his manner was most disquieting. "To-morrow—or next day."

"Don't you think I'm right about it being humiliating for us to go back to Washington and live poorly?"

"Undoubtedly. I've felt that from the beginning."

"Then you agree with me?"

"Not altogether," said he. And there was a quiet sternness in his smile, in his gentle tone, that increased her alarms. "I've been hoping, rather," continued he, "that you'd take an interest in my career."

"I do," cried she.

"Not in MY career," replied he, those powerful, hewn features of his sad and bitter. "In your own—in a career in which I'd become as contemptible as the rest of the men you know—a poor thing like Grant Arkwright. Worse, for I'd do very badly what he has learned to do well."

"To be a well-bred, well-mannered gentleman is no small achievement," said she with a sweetness that was designed to turn to gall after it reached him.

He surveyed her tranquilly. She remembered that look; it was the same he had had the morning he met her at the Waldorf elevator and took her away and married her. She knew that the crisis had come and that he was ready. And she? Never had she felt less capable, less resolute.

"I've been doing a good deal of thinking—thinking about us—these last few days—since I inflicted that scratch on you," said he. "Among other things, I've concluded you know as little about what constitutes a real gentleman as I do; also, that you have no idea what it is in you that makes you a lady—so far as you are one."

She glanced at him in fright, and that expression of hers betrayed the fundamental weakness in her—the weakness that underlies all character based upon the achievements of others, not upon one's own. Margaret was three generations away from self-reliance. Craig's speech sounded like a deliberate insult, deliberate attempt to precipitate a quarrel, an estrangement. There had been nothing in her training to prepare her for such a rude, courage-testing event as that.

"Do you remember—it was the day we married—the talk we had about my relatives?"

She colored, was painfully embarrassed, strove in vain to conceal it. "About your relatives?" she said inquiringly.

He made an impatient gesture. "I know you remember. Well, if I had been a gentleman, or had known what gentleman meant, I'd never have said—or, rather, looked what I did then. If you had known what a gentleman is, if you had been a lady, you'd have been unable to go on with a man who had shown himself such a blackguard."

"You are unjust to us both," she eagerly interrupted. "Joshua—you—"

"Don't try to excuse me—or yourself," said he peremptorily. "Now, you thought what I showed that day—my being ashamed of honester, straighter—more American—people than you or I will ever be—you thought that was the real me. Thank God, it wasn't. But"—he pointed a fascinating forefinger at her—"it was the me I'd be if you had your way."

She could not meet his eyes.

"I see you understand," said he earnestly. "That's a good sign."

"Yes, I do understand," said she. Her voice was low and her head was still hanging. "I'm glad you've said this. I—I respect you for it."

"Don't fret about me," said he curtly. "Fret about your own melancholy case. What do your impulses of decent feeling amount to, anyway? An inch below the surface you're all for the other sort of thing—the cheap and nasty. If you could choose this minute you'd take the poorest of those drawing-room marionettes before the finest real man, if he didn't know how to wear his clothes or had trouble with his grammar."

She felt that there was more than a grain of truth in this; at any rate, denial would be useless, as his tone was the tone of settled conviction.

"We've made a false start," proceeded he. He rose, lighted a cigarette. "We're going to start all over again. I'll tell you what I'm going to do about it in a day or two."

And he strolled away to the landing. She saw him presently enter a canoe; under his powerful, easy stroke it shot away, to disappear behind the headland. She felt horribly lonely and oppressed—as if she would never see him again. "He's quite capable of leaving me here to find my way back to Washington alone—quite capable!" And her lip curled.

But the scorn was all upon the surface. Beneath there was fear and respect—the fear and respect which those demoralized by unearned luxury and by the purposeless life always feel when faced by strength and self-reliance in the crises where externals avail no more than its paint and its bunting a warship in battle. She knew she had been treating him as no self-respecting man who knew the world would permit any woman to treat him. She knew her self-respect should have kept her from treating him thus, even if he, in his ignorance of her world and awe of it, would permit. But more than from shame at vain self-abasement her chagrin came from the sense of having played her game so confidently, so carelessly, so stupidly that he had seen it. She winced as she recalled how shrewdly and swiftly he had got to the very bottom of her, especially of her selfishness in planning to use him with no thought for his good. Yet so many women thus used their husbands; why not she? "I suppose I began too soon.... No, not too soon, but too frigidly." The word seemed to her to illuminate the whole situation. "That's it!" she cried. "How stupid of me!"

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT THE MOON SAW AND DID

Physical condition is no doubt the dominant factor in human thought and action. State of soul is, as Doctor Schulze has observed, simply the egotistic human vanity for state of body. If the health of the human race were better, if sickness, the latent and the revealed together, were not all but universal, human relations would be wonderfully softened, sweetened and simplified. Indigestion, with its various ramifications, is alone responsible for most of the crimes, catastrophes and cruelties, public and private discord; for it tinges human thought and vision with pessimistic black or bloody red or envious green or degenerate yellow instead of the normal, serene and invigorating white. All the world's great public disturbers have been diseased. As for private life, its bad of all degrees could, as to its deep-lying, originating causes, be better diagnosed by physician than by psychologist.

Margaret, being in perfect physical condition, was deeply depressed for only a short time after the immediate cause of her mood ceased to be active. An hour after Joshua had revealed himself in thunder and lightning, and had gone, she was almost serene again, her hopefulness of healthy youth and her sense of humor in the ascendent. Their stay in the woods was drawing to an end. Soon they would be off for Lenox, for her Uncle Dan's, where there would be many people about and small, perhaps no, opportunity for direct and quick action and result. She reviewed her conduct and felt that she had no reason to reproach herself for not having made an earlier beginning in what she now saw should have been her tactics with her "wild man." How could she, inexpert, foresee what was mockingly obvious to hindsight? Only by experiment and failure is the art of success learned. Her original plan had been the best possible, taking into account her lack of knowledge of male nature and the very misleading indications of his real character she had got from him. In her position would not almost any one have decided that the right way to move him was by holding him at respectful distance and by indirect talk, with the inevitable drift of events doing the principal work—gradually awakening him to the responsibilities and privileges which his entry into a higher social station implied?

But no time must now be lost; the new way, which experience had revealed, must be taken forthwith and traveled by forced marches. Before they left the woods she must have led him through all the gradations of domestic climate between their present frosty if kindly winter, and summer, or, at least, a very balmy spring. From what she knew of his temperament she guessed that once she began to thaw he would forthwith whirl her into July. She must be prepared to accept that, however—repellent though the thought was—she assured herself it was most repellent. She prided herself on her skill at catching and checking herself in self-deception; but it somehow did not occur to her to contrast her rather listless previous planning with the energy and interest she at once put into this project for supreme martyrdom, as she regarded it.

When he came back that evening she was ready. But not he; he stalked in, sulking and blustering, tired, ignoring her, doing all the talking himself, and departing for bed as soon as dinner was over. She felt as if he had repulsed her, though, in fact, her overtures were wholly internal and could not, by any chance, have impressed him. Bitter against him and dreading the open humiliation she would have to endure before she could make one so self-absorbed

see what she was about, she put out her light early, with intent to rise when he did and be at breakfast before he could finish. She lay awake until nearly dawn, then fell into a deep sleep. When she woke it was noon; she felt so greatly refreshed that her high good humor would not suffer her to be deeply resentful against him for this second failure. "No matter," reflected she. "He might have suspected me if I'd done anything so revolutionary as appear at breakfast. I'll make my beginning at lunch."

She was now striving, with some success, to think of him as a tyrant whom she, luckless martyr, must cajole. "I'm going the way of all the married women," thought she. "They soon find there's no honorable way to get their rights from their masters, find they simply have to degrade themselves." Yes, he was forcing her to degrade herself, to simulate affection when the reverse was in her heart. Well, she would make him pay dearly for it—some day. Meanwhile she must gain her point. "If I don't, I'd better not have married. To be Mrs. is something, but not much if I'm the creature of his whims."

She put off lunch nearly an hour; but he did not come, did not reappear until dinner was waiting. "I've been over to town," he explained, "doing a lot of telegraphing that was necessary." He was in vast spirits, delighted with himself, volubly boastful, so full of animal health and life and of joy in the prospect of food and sleep that mental worries were as foreign to him as to the wild geese flying overhead.

He snuffed the air in which the odor of cooking was mingled deliciously with the odor of the pines. "If they don't hurry up dinner," said he, "I'll rush in and eat off the stove. We used to at home sometimes. It's great fun."

She smiled tolerantly. "I've missed you," said she, and she was telling herself that this statement of a literal truth was the quintessence of hypocritical cajolery. "You might have taken me along."

He gave her a puzzled look. "Oh," said he finally, "you've been thinking over what I said."

This was disconcerting; but she contrived to smile with winning frankness. "Yes," replied she. "I've been very wrong, I see." She felt proud of the adroitness of this—an exact truth, yet wholly misleading.

His expression told her that he was congratulating himself on his wisdom and success in having given her a sharp talking to; that he was thinking it had brought her to her senses, had restored her respect for him, had opened the way for her love for him to begin to show itself—that love which he so firmly believed in, egotist that he was! Could anything be more infuriating? Yet—after all, what difference did it make, so long as he yielded? And once she had him enthralled, then—ah, yes—THEN! Meanwhile she must remember that the first principle of successful deception is self-deception, and must try to convince herself that she was what she was pretending to be.

Dinner was served, and he fell to like a harvest hand. As he had the habit, when he was very hungry, of stuffing his mouth far too full for speech, she was free to carry out her little program of encouraging talk and action. As she advanced from hesitating compliment to flattery, to admiring glances, to lingering look, she marveled at her facility. "I suppose ages and ages of dreadful necessity have made it second nature to every woman, even the best of us," reflected she. If he weren't a handsome, superior man she might be finding it more difficult; also, no doubt the surroundings, so romantic, so fitting as background for his ruggedness, were helping her to dexterity and even enthusiasm.

It was amusing, how she deceived herself—for the harmless self-deceptions of us chronic mummers are always amusing. The fact was, this melting and inviting mood had far more of nature and sincerity in it than there had been in her icy aloofness. Icy aloofness, except in the heroines of aristocratic novels, is a state of mind compatible only with extreme stupidity or with some one of those organic diseases that sour the disposition. Never had she been in such health as in that camp, never so buoyant, never had merely being alive been so deliciously intoxicating; the scratch he had made on her throat had healed in twenty-four hours, had all but disappeared in seventy-two. Never had she known to such a degree what a delight a body can be, the sense of its eagerness to bring to the mind all the glorious pleasures of the senses. Whatever disinclination she had toward him was altogether a prompting of class education; now that she had let down the bars and released feeling she was in heart glad he was there with her, glad he was "such a MAN of a man."

The guides made a huge fire down by the shore, and left them alone. They sat by it until nearly ten o'clock, he talking incessantly; her overtures had roused in him the desire to please, and, instead of the usual monologue of egotism and rant, he poured out poetry, eloquence, sense and humorous shrewdness. Had he been far less the unusual, the great man, she would still have listened with a sense of delight, for in her mood that night his penetrating voice, which, in other moods, she found as insupportable as a needle-pointed goad, harmonized with the great, starry sky and the mysterious, eerie shadows of forest and mountain and lake close round their huge, bright fire. As they rose to go in, up came the moon. A broad, benevolent, encouraging face, the face of a matchmaker. Craig put his arm round Margaret. She trembled and thrilled.

"Do you know what that moon's saying?" asked he. In his voice was that exquisite tone that enabled him to make even commonplaces lift great audiences to their feet to cheer him wildly.

She lifted soft, shining eyes to his. "What?" she inquired under her breath. She had forgotten her schemes, her resentments, her make-believe of every kind. "What—Joshua?" she repeated.

"It's saying: 'Hurry up, you silly children, down there! Don't you know that life is a minute and youth a second?'" And now both his arms were round her and one of her hands lay upon his shoulder.

"Life a minute—youth a second," she murmured.

"Do you think I'd scratch you horribly if I kissed you—Rita?"

She lowered her eyes but not her face. "You might try—Josh."

CHAPTER XXIV

"OUR HOUSE IS AFIRE"

Next morning she was up and in her dressing-room and had almost finished her toilette before he awakened. For the first time in years—perhaps the first time since the end of her happy girlhood and the beginning of her first season in Washington society—she felt like singing. Was there ever such a dawn? Did ever song of birds sound so like the voice of eternal youth? Whence had come this air like the fumes from the winepresses of the gods? And the light! What colors, what tints, upon mountain and valley and halcyon lake! And the man asleep in the next room—yes, there WAS a Joshua Craig whom she found extremely trying at times; but that Joshua Craig had somehow resigned the tenancy of the strong, straight form there, had resigned it to a man who was the living expression of all that bewitched her in these wilds.

She laughed softly at her own ecstasy of exaggeration. "The other Josh will come back," she reminded herself, "and I must not forget to be practical. THIS is episodic." These happy, superhuman episodes would come, would pass, would recur at intervals; but the routine of her life must be lived. And if these episodes were to recur the practical must not be neglected. "It's by neglecting the practical that so many wives come to grief," reflected she. And the first mandate of the practical was that he must be rescued from that vulgar political game, which meant poverty and low associations and tormenting uncertainties. He must be got where his talents would have their due, their reward. But subtly guiding him into the way that would be best for him was a far different matter from what she had been planning up to last night's moonrise—was as abysmally separated from its selfish hypocrisy as love from hate. She would persist in her purpose, but how changed the motive!

She heard him stirring in her—no, THEIR room. Her face lighted up, her eyes sparkled. She ran to the mirror for a final primp before he should see her. She was more than pleased with the image she saw reflected there. "I never looked better in my life—never so well. I'm glad I kept back this particular dress. He's sure to like it, and it certainly is becoming to me—the best-fitting skirt I ever had—what good lines it has about the hips." She startled at a knock upon the door. She rushed away from the mirror. He had small physical vanity himself—she had never known any one with so little. He had shown that he thought she had no vanity of that kind, either, and he would doubtless misunderstand her solicitude about her personal appearance. Anyhow, of all mornings this would be the worst for him to catch her at the glass.

"Yes?" she called.

"Margaret," came in his voice. And, oh, the difference in it!—the note of tenderness—no, it was not imagination, it was really there! Her eyes filled and her bosom heaved.

"Are you joining me at breakfast?"

"Come in," cried she.

When the door did not open she went and opened it. There stood HE! If he had greeted her with a triumphant, proprietorial expression she would have been—well, it would have given her a lowered opinion of his sensibility. But his look was just right—dazzled, shy, happy. Nor did he make one of his impetuous rushes. He almost timidly took her hand, kissed it; and it was she who sought his shoulder—gladly, eagerly, with a sudden, real shyness. "Margaret," he said. "Mine—aren't you?"

Here was the Joshua she was to know thenceforth, she felt. This Joshua would enable her to understand, or, rather, to disregard, so far as she personally was concerned, the Josh, tempestuous, abrupt, often absurd, whom the world knew. But—As soon as they went where the guides were, the familiar Josh returned—boyish, boisterous, rather foolish in trying to be frivolous and light. Still—what did it matter? As soon as they should be alone again—

When they set out after breakfast her Joshua still did not return, as she had confidently expected. The obstreperous one remained, the one that was the shrewdly-developed cover for his everlasting scheming mind. "What an unending ass I've been making of myself," he burst out, "with my silly notions." He drew a paper from his pocket and handed it to her. "And this infernal thing of Grant's has been encouraging me in idiocy."

She read the Arkwright gentleman's gazette and complete guide to dress and conduct in the society of a refined gentlewoman. Her impulse was to laugh, an impulse hard indeed to restrain when she came to the last line of the document and read in Grant's neat, careful-man's handwriting with heavy underscorings: "Above all, never forget that you are a mighty stiff dose for anybody, and could easily become an overdose for a refined, sensitive lady." But prudent foresight made her keep her countenance. "This is all very sensible," said she.

"Sensible enough," assented he. "I've learned a lot from it.... Did you read that last sentence?"

She turned her face away. "Yes," she said.

"That, taken with everything else, all but got me down," said he somberly. "God, what I've been through! It came near preventing us from discovering that you're not a grand lady but a human being." His mood veered, and it was he that was gay and she glum; for he suddenly seized her and subjected her to one of those tumultuous ordeals so disastrous to toilette and to dignity and to her sense of personal rights. Not that she altogether disliked; she never had altogether disliked, had found a certain thrill in his rude riotousness. Still, she preferred the other Joshua Craig, HER Joshua, who wished to receive as well as to give. And she wished that Joshua, her Joshua, would return. She herself had thought that, so far as she was concerned, those periods of tender and gentle sentiment would be episodic; but it was another thing for him to think so—and to show it frankly. "I feel as if I'd had an adventure with a bear," said she, half-laughing, half-resentful.

"So you did," declared he; "I'm a bear—and every other sort of animal—except rabbit. There's no rabbit in me. Now, your men—the Grant Arkwrights—are all rabbit."

"At least," said she, "do refrain from tearing my hair down. A woman who does her hair well hates to have it mussed."

"I'll try to remember," was his careless answer. "As I was about to say, our discovery that you are not a lady out of a story-book, but a human being and a very sweet one—it came just in the nick of time. We're leaving here to-night."

Now she saw the reason for the persistence of the Craig of noise and bluster—and craft. "To-night?" she exclaimed. "It's impossible."

"Yes—we go at five o'clock. Tickets are bought—sleeper section engaged—everything arranged."

"But Uncle Dan doesn't expect us for four days yet."

"I've sent him a telegram."

"But I can't pack."

"Selina can."

"Impossible in such a little time."

"Then I'll do it," said Craig jovially. "I can pack a trunk twice as quick as any man you ever saw. I pack with my feet as well as with my hands."

"It's impossible," repeated she angrily. "I detest being hurried."

"Hurried? Why, you've got nine hours to get used to the idea. Nine hours' warning for anything isn't haste."

"Why didn't you tell me this yesterday?" demanded she, coming to a full stop and expecting thus to compel him to face her. But he marched on.

"It has been my lifelong habit," declared he over his shoulder, "to arrange everything before disclosing my plans. You'll find, as we get on, that it will save you a lot of fretting and debating."

Reluctantly and with the humiliating sense of helpless second fiddle she followed him along the rough path. "I loathe surprises," she said.

"Then adjust your mind to not being surprised at anything from me."

He laughed noisily at his own humor. She was almost hating him again. He seemed to have eyes in the back of his head; for as she shot a fiery glance at him he whirled round, shook his forefinger maddeningly at her: "Now listen to me, my dear," said he, in his very worst manner, most aggressive, most dictatorial; "if you had wanted an ordinary sort of man you should have married one and not me."

"Don't you think common courtesy required you at least to consult me about such a matter?"

"I do not. If I had I should have done so. I found it was necessary that we go. I went ahead and arranged it. If you saw the house on fire would you wait till you had consulted me before putting it out?"

"But this is entirely different."

"Not at all. Entirely the same, on the contrary. The talk we had day before yesterday convinced me that our house is afire. I'm going to put it out." He shut his teeth together with a snap, compressed his lips, gave her one of those quick, positive nods of his Viking head. Then he caught her by the arm. "Now," said he jocosely, "let's go back to camp. You want to do your packing. I've got to go over to the station and telegraph some more."

She wrenched her arm away pettishly and, with sullen face, accompanied him to the camp. It was all she could do to hide her anger when, in full sight of the guides, he swept her up into his arms and kissed her several times. Possibly she would have been really angered, deeply angered, had she realized that these cyclones were due, as a rule, not so much to appreciation of her as to the necessity of a strong counter-irritant to a sudden attack of awe of her as a fine lady and doubt of his own ability to cope with her. "Good-by, Rita," cried he, releasing her as suddenly as he had seized her and rushing toward the landing. "If I don't get back till the last minute be sure you're ready. Anything that isn't ready will be left behind—anything or anybody!"

The idea of revolt, of refusing to go, appealed to her first anger strongly. But, on consideration, she saw that merely asserting her rights would not be enough—that she must train him to respect them. If she refused to go he would simply leave her; yes, he was just the man, the wild man, to do precisely that disgraceful thing. And she would be horribly afraid to spend the night alone in those woods with only the guides and Selina, not to speak of facing the morrow—for he might refuse to take her back! Where would she turn in that case? What would her grandmother say? Who would support her in making such a scandal and giving up a husband for reasons that could not be made impressive in words though they were the best of all reasons in terms of feeling? No, if she gave him up she would be absolutely alone, condemned on every hand, in the worst possible position. Then, too, the break was unattractive for another reason. Though she despised herself for her weakness, she did not wish to give up the man who had given her that brief glimpse of happiness she had dreamed as one dreams an impossibility. Did not wish? Could not—would not—give him up. "I belong to him!" she thought with a thrill of ecstasy and of despair.

"But he'd better be careful!" she grumbled. "If I should begin to dislike him there'd be no going back." And then it recurred to her that this would be as great a calamity of loss for her as for him—and she went at her packing in a better humor. "I'll explain to him that I yield this once, but—" There she stopped herself with a laugh. Of what use to explain to him?—him who never listened to explanations, who did not care a fig why people did as he wished, but was content that they did. As for warning him about "next time"—how ridiculous! She could hear his penetrating, rousing voice saying: "We'll deal with 'next time' when it comes."

CHAPTER XXV

MRS. JOSHUA CRAIG

"We change at Albany," said he when they were on the train, after a last hour of mad scramble, due in part to her tardiness, in the main to the atmosphere of hysteric hustle and bustle he created as a precaution.

"At Albany!" she exclaimed. "Why, when do we get there?"

"At midnight."

"At midnight!" It was the last drop in the cup of gall, she thought. "Why, we'd get to Lenox, or to some place where we'd have to change again, long before morning! Josh, you must be out of your senses. It's a perfect outrage!"

"Best I could do," said he, laughing uproariously and patting her on the back. "Cheer up. You can sleep on my shoulder until we get to Albany."

"We will go on to New York," said she stiffly, "and leave from there in the morning."

"Can't do it," said he. "Must change at Albany. You ought to learn to control your temper over these little inconveniences of life. I've brought a volume of Emerson's essays along and I'll read to you if you don't want to sleep."

"I hate to be read aloud to. Joshua, let's go on to New York. Such a night of horror as you've planned will wear me out."

"I tell you it's impossible. I've done the best thing in the circumstances. You'll see."

Suddenly she sprang up, looked wildly round. "Where's Selina?" she gasped.

"Coming to-morrow or next day," replied he. "I sent her to the camp for some things I forgot."

She sank back and said no more. Again she was tempted to revolt against such imbecile tyranny; and again, as she debated the situation, the wisdom, the necessity of submitting became apparent. How would it sound to have to explain to her grandmother that she had left him because he took an inconvenient train? "I'd like to see him try this sort of thing if we'd been married six months instead of six weeks," she muttered.

She refused to talk with him, answered him in cold monosyllables. And after dinner, when he produced the volume of Emerson and began to read aloud, she curtly asked him to be quiet. "I wish to sleep!" snapped she.

"Do, dear," urged he. And he put his arm around her.

"That's very uncomfortable," said she, trying to draw away.

He drew her back, held her—and she knew she must either submit or make a scene. There was small attraction to scene-making with such a master of disgraceful and humiliating scenes as he. "He wouldn't care a rap," she muttered. "He simply revels in scenes, knowing he's sure to win out at them as a mongrel in a fight with a"—even in that trying moment her sense of humor did not leave her—"with a lapdog."

She found herself comfortable and amazingly content, leaning against his shoulder; and presently she went to sleep, he holding the book in his free hand and reading calmly. The next thing she knew he was shaking her gently. "Albany," he said. "We've got to change here."

She rose sleepily and followed him from the car, adjusting her hat as she went. She had thought she would be wretched; instead, she felt fine as the sharp, night air roused her nerves and freshened her skin. He led the way into the empty waiting-room; the porter piled the bags on the bench; she seated herself. "I must send a telegram," said he, and he went over to the window marked "Telegraph Office." It was closed. He knocked and rattled, and finally pounded on the glass with his umbrella handle.

Her nerves went all to pieces. "Can't you see," she called impatiently, "that there's no one there?"

"There will be some one!" he shouted in reply, and fell to pounding so vigorously that she thought the glass would surely break. But it did not; after a while the window flew up and an angry face just escaped a blow from the vibrating umbrella handle. A violent altercation followed, the operator raging, but Craig more uproarious than he and having the further advantage of a more extensive and more picturesque vocabulary. Finally the operator said: "I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself. Don't you see there's a lady present?"

"It's my wife," said Craig. "Now take this message and get it off at once. You should thank me for not having you dismissed."

The operator read the message. His face changed and he said in a surlily apologetic manner: "I'll send it off right away, Mr. Craig. Anything else?"

"That's all, my friend," said Josh. He returned to his wife's side. She was all confusion and doubt again. Here they were back in civilization, and her man of the woods was straightway running amuck. What should she do? What COULD she do? WHAT had she got herself into by marrying?

But he was speaking. "My dear," he was saying in his sharp, insistent voice, that at once aroused and enfeebled the nerves, "I must talk fast, as the train comes in fifteen or twenty minutes—the train for Chicago—for Minneapolis—for Wayne—for home—OUR home."

She started up from the seat, pale, quivering, her hands clinched against her bosom.

"For home," he repeated, fixing her with his resolute, green-blue eyes. "Please, sit down."

She sank to the seat. "Do you mean—" she began, but her faltering voice could not go on.

"I've resigned from office," said he, swift and calm. "I've told the President I'll not take the Attorney-Generalship. I've telegraphed your people at Lenox that we're not coming. And I'm going home to run for Governor. My telegrams assure me the nomination, and, with the hold I've got on the people, that means election, sure pop. I make my first speech day after to-morrow afternoon—with you on the platform beside me."

"You are mistaken," she said in a cold, hard voice. "You—"

"Now don't speak till you've thought, and don't think till I finish. As you yourself said, Washington's no place for us—at present. Anyhow, the way to get there right is to be sent there from the people—by the people. You are the wife of a public man, but you've had no training."

"I—" she began.

"Hear me first," he said, between entreaty and command. "You think I'm the one that's got it all to learn. Think again. The little tiddledywinks business that I've got to learn—all the value there is in the mass of balderdash about manners and dress—I can learn it in a few lessons. You can teach it to me in no time. But what you've got to learn—how to be a wife, how to live on a modest income, how to take care of me, and help me in my career, how to be a woman instead of, largely, a dressmaker's or a dancing-master's expression for lady-likeness—to learn all that is going to take time. And we must begin at once; for, as I told you, the house is afire."

She opened her lips to speak.

"No—not yet," said he. "One thing more. You've been thinking things about me. Well, do you imagine this busy brain of mine hasn't been thinking a few things about you? Why, Margaret, you need me even more than I need you, though I need you more than I'd dare try to tell you. You need just such a man as me to give you direction and purpose—REAL backbone. Primping and preening in carriages and parlors—THAT isn't life. It's the frosting on the cake. Now, you and I, we're going to have the cake itself. Maybe with, maybe without the frosting. BUT NOT THE FROSTING WITHOUT THE CAKE, MARGARET!"

"So!" she exclaimed, drawing a long breath when he had ended. "So! THIS is why you chose that five o'clock train and sent Selina back. You thought to—"

He laughed as if echoing delight from her; he patted her enthusiastically on the knee. "You've guessed it! Go up head! I didn't want you to have time to say and do foolish things."

She bit her lip till the blood came. Ringing in her ears and defying her efforts to silence them were those words of his about the cake and the frosting—"the cake, maybe with, maybe without frosting; BUT NOT THE FROSTING WITHOUT THE CAKE!" She started to speak; but it was no interruption from him that checked her, for he sat silent, looking at her with all his fiery strength of soul in his magnetic eyes. Again she started to speak; and a third time; and each time checked herself. This impossible man, this creator of impossible situations! She did not know how to begin, or how to go on after she should have begun. She felt that even if she had known what to say she would probably lack the courage to say it—that final-test courage which only the trained in self-reliance have. The door opened. A station attendant came in out of the frosty night and shouted:

"Chicago Express! Express for—Buffalo! Chicago! Minneapolis! St. Paul!—the Northwest!—the Far West! All—a—BOARD!"

Craig seized the handbags. "Come on, my dear!" he cried, getting into rapid motion.

She sat still.

He was at the door. "Come on," he said.

She looked appealingly, helplessly round that empty, lonely, strange station, its lights dim, its suggestions all inhospitable. "He has me at his mercy," she said to herself, between anger and despair. "How can I refuse to go without becoming the laughing-stock of the whole world?"

"Come on—Rita!" he cried. The voice was aggressive, but his face was deathly pale and the look out of his eyes was the call of a great loneliness. And she saw it and felt it. She braced herself against it; but a sob surged up in her throat—the answer of her heart to his heart's cry of loneliness and love.

"Chicago Express!" came in the train-caller's warning roar from behind her, as if the room were crowded instead of tenanted by those two only. "All aboard!... Hurry up, lady, or you'll get left!"

Get left!... Left!—the explosion of that hoarse, ominous voice seemed to blow Mrs. Joshua Craig from the seat, to sweep her out through the door her husband was holding open, and into the train for their home.

THE END

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