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## A MODERN CHRONICLE

By Winston Churchill

### BOOK I.

#### Volume 2.

#### CHAPTER VII

##### THE OLYMPIAN ORDER

Lying back in the chair of the Pullman and gazing over the wide Hudson shining in the afternoon sun, Honora's imagination ran riot until the seeming possibilities of life became infinite. At every click of the rails she was drawing nearer to that great world of which she had dreamed, a world of country houses inhabited by an Olympian order. To be sure, Susan, who sat reading in the chair behind her, was but a humble representative of that order—but Providence sometimes makes use of such instruments. The picture of the tall and brilliant Ethel Wing standing behind the brass rail of the platform of the car was continually recurring to Honora as emblematic: of Ethel, in a blue tailor-made gown trimmed with buff braid, and which fitted her slender figure with military exactness. Her hair, the colour of the yellowest of gold, in the manner of its finish seemed somehow to give the impression of that metal; and the militant effect of the costume had been heightened by a small colonial cocked hat. If the truth be told, Honora had secretly idealized Miss Wing, and had found her insouciance, frankness, and tendency to ridicule delightful. Militant—that was indeed Ethel's note—militant and positive.

"You're not going home with Susan!" she had exclaimed, making a little face when Honora had told her. "They say that Silverdale is as slow as a nunnery—and you're on your knees all the time. You ought to have come to Newport with me."

It was characteristic of Miss Wing that she seemed to have taken no account of the fact that she had neglected to issue this alluring invitation. Life at Silverdale slow! How could it be slow amidst such beauty and magnificence?

The train was stopping at a new little station on which hung the legend, in gold letters, "Sutton." The sun was well on his journey towards the western hills. Susan had touched her on the shoulder.

"Here we are, Honora," she said, and added, with an unusual tremor in her voice, "at last!"

On the far side of the platform a yellow, two-seated wagon was waiting, and away they drove through the village, with its old houses and its sleepy streets and its orchards, and its ancient tavern dating from stage-coach days. Just outside of it, on the tree-dotted slope of a long hill, was a modern brick building, exceedingly practical in appearance, surrounded by spacious grounds enclosed in a paling fence. That, Susan said, was the Sutton Home.

"Your mother's charity?"

A light came into the girl's eyes.

"So you have heard of it? Yes, it is the, thing that interests mother more than anything else in the world."

"Oh," said Honora, "I hope she will let me go through it."

"I'm sure she will want to take you there to-morrow," answered Susan, and she smiled.

The road wound upwards, by the valley of a brook, through the hills, now wooded, now spread with pastures that shone golden green in the evening light, the herds gathering at the gate-bars. Presently they came to a gothic-looking stone building, with a mediaeval bridge thrown across the stream in front of it, and massive gates flung open. As they passed, Honora had a glimpse of a blue driveway under the arch of the forest. An elderly woman looked out at them through the open half of a leaded lattice.

"That's the Chamberlin estate," Susan volunteered. "Mr. Chamberlin has built a castle on the top of that hill."

Honora caught her breath.

"Are many of the places here like that?" she asked. Susan laughed.

"Some people don't think the place is very—appropriate," she contented herself with replying.

A little later, as they climbed higher, other houses could be discerned dotted about the country-side, nearly all of them varied expressions of the passion for a new architecture which seemed to possess the rich. Most of them were in conspicuous positions, and surrounded by wide acres. Each, to Honora, was an inspiration.

"I had no idea there were so many people here," she said.

"I'm afraid Sutton is becoming fashionable," answered Susan.

"And don't you want it to?" asked Honora.

"It was very nice before," said Susan, quietly.

Honora was silent. They turned in between two simple stone pillars that divided a low wall, overhung from the inside by shrubbery growing under the forest. Susan seized her friend's hand and pressed it.

"I'm always so glad to get back here," she whispered. "I hope you'll like it."

Honora returned the pressure.

The grey road forked, and forked again. Suddenly the forest came to an end in a sort of premeditated tangle of wild garden, and across a wide lawn the great house loomed against the western sky. Its architecture was of the '60's and '70's, with a wide porte-cochere that sheltered the high entrance doors. These were both flung open, a butler and two footmen were standing impassively beside them, and a neat maid within. Honora climbed the steps as in a dream, followed Susan through a hall with a black-walnut, fretted staircase, and where she caught a glimpse of two huge Chinese vases, to a porch

on the other side of the house spread with wicker chairs and tables. Out of a group of people at the farther end of this porch arose an elderly lady, who came forward and clasped Susan in her arms.

"And is this Honora? How do you do, my dear? I had the pleasure of knowing you when you were much younger."

Honora, too, was gathered to that ample bosom. Released, she beheld a lady in a mauve satin gown, at the throat of which a cameo brooch was fastened. Mrs. Holt's face left no room for conjecture as to the character of its possessor. Her hair, of a silvering blend, parted in the middle, fitted tightly to her head. She wore earrings. In short, her appearance was in every way suggestive of momentum, of a force which the wise would respect.

"Where are you, Joshua?" she said. "This is the baby we brought from Nice. Come and tell me whether you would recognize her."

Mr. Holt released his—daughter. He had a mild blue eye, white mutton-chop whiskers, and very thin hands, and his tweed suit was decidedly the worse for wear.

"I can't say that I should, Elvira," he replied; "although it is not hard to believe that such a beautiful baby should, prove to be such a—er —good-looking young woman."

"I've always felt very grateful to you for bringing me back," said Honora.

"Tut, tut, child," said Mrs. Holt; "there was no one else to do it. And be careful how you pay young women compliments, Joshua. They grow vain enough. By the way, my dear, what ever became of your maternal grandfather, old Mr. Allison—wasn't that his name?"

"He died when I was very young," replied Honora.

"He was too fond of the good things of this life," said Mrs. Holt.

"My dear Elvira!" her husband protested.

"I can't help it, he was," retorted that lady. "I am a judge of human nature, and I was relieved, I can tell you, my dear" (to Honora), "when I saw your uncle and aunt on the wharf that morning. I knew that I had confided you to good hands."

"They have done everything for me, Mrs. Holt," said Honora.

The good lady patted her approvingly on the shoulder.

"I'm sure of it, my dear," she said. "And I am glad to see you appreciate it. And now you must renew your acquaintance with the family."

A sister and a brother, Honora had already learned from Susan, had died since she had crossed the ocean with them. Robert and Joshua, Junior, remained. Both were heavyset, with rather stern faces, both had close-cropped, tan-coloured mustaches and wide jaws, with blue eyes like Susan's. Both were, with women at least, what the French would call difficult—Robert less so than Joshua. They greeted Honora reservedly and—she could not help feeling—a little suspiciously. And their appearance was something of a shock to her; they did not, somehow, "go with the house," and they dressed even more carelessly than Peter Erwin. This was particularly true of Joshua, whose low, turned-down collar revealed a porous, brick-red, and extremely virile neck, and whose clothes were creased at the knees and across the back.

As for their wives, Mrs. Joshua was a merry, brown-eyed little lady already inclining to stoutness, and Honora felt at home with her at once. Mrs. Robert was tall and thin, with an olive face and dark eyes which gave the impression of an uncomfortable penetration. She was dressed simply in a shirtwaist and a dark skirt, but Honora thought her striking looking.

The grandchildren, playing on and off the porch, seemed legion, and they were besieging Susan. In reality there were seven of them, of all sizes and sexes, from the third Joshua with a tennis-bat to the youngest who was weeping at being sent to bed, and holding on to her Aunt Susan with desperation. When Honora had greeted them all, and kissed some of them, she was informed that there were two more upstairs, safely tucked away in cribs.

"I'm sure you love children, don't you?" said Mrs. Joshua. She spoke impulsively, and yet with a kind of childlike shyness.

"I adore them," exclaimed Honora.

A trellised arbour (which some years later would have been called a pergola) led from the porch up the hill to an old-fashioned summer-house on the crest. And thither, presently, Susan led Honora for a view of the distant western hills silhouetted in black against a flaming western sky, before escorting her to her room. The vastness of the house, the width of the staircase, and the size of the second-story hall impressed our heroine.

"I'll send a maid to you later, dear," Susan said. "If you care to lie down for half an hour, no one will disturb you. And I hope you will be comfortable."

Comfortable! When the door had closed, Honora glanced around her and sighed, "comfort" seemed such a strangely inadequate word. She was reminded of the illustrations she had seen of English country houses. The bed alone would almost have filled her little room at home. On the farther side, in an alcove, was a huge dressing-table; a fire was laid in the grate of the marble mantel, the curtains in the bay window were tightly drawn, and near by was a lounge with a reading-light. A huge mahogany wardrobe occupied one corner; in another stood a pier glass, and in another, near the lounge, was a small bookcase filled with books. Honora looked over them curiously. "Robert Elsmere" and a life of Christ, "Mr. Isaacs," a book of sermons by an eminent clergyman, "Innocents Abroad," Hare's "Walks in Rome," "When a Man's Single," by Barrie, a book of meditations, and "Organized Charities for Women."

Adjoining the bedroom was a bathroom in proportion, evidently all her own,—with a huge porcelain tub and a table set with toilet bottles containing liquids of various colours.

Dreamily, Honora slipped on the new dressing-gown Aunt Mary had made for her, and took a book out of the bookcase. It was the volume of sermons. But she could not read: she was forever looking about the room, and thinking of the family she had met downstairs. Of course, when one lived in a house like this, one could afford to dress and act as one liked. She was aroused from her reflections by the soft but penetrating notes of a Japanese gong, followed by a gentle knock on the door and the entrance of an elderly maid, who informed her it was time to dress for dinner.

"If you'll excuse me, Miss," said that hitherto silent individual when the operation was completed, "you do look lovely."

Honora, secretly, was of that opinion too as she surveyed herself in the long glass. The simple summer silk, of a deep and glowing pink, rivalled the colour in her cheeks, and contrasted with the dark and shining masses of her hair; and on her neck glistened a little pendant of her mother's jewels, which Aunt Mary, with Cousin Eleanor's assistance, had had set in New York. Honora's figure was that of a woman of five and twenty: her neck was a slender column, her head well set, and the look of race, which had been hers since childhood, was at nineteen more accentuated. All this she saw, and went down the stairs in a kind of exultation. And when on the threshold of the drawing-room she paused, the conversation suddenly ceased. Mr. Holt and his sons got up somewhat precipitately, and Mrs. Holt came forward to meet her.

"I hope you weren't waiting for me," said Honora, timidly.

"No indeed, my dear," said Mrs. Holt. Tucking Honora's hand under her arm, she led the way majestically to the dining-room, a large apartment with a dimly lighted conservatory at the farther end, presided over by the decorous butler and his assistants. A huge chandelier with prisms hung over the flowers at the centre of the table, which sparkled with glass and silver, while dishes of vermilion and yellow fruits relieved the whiteness of the cloth. Honora found herself beside Mr. Holt, who looked more shrivelled than ever in his evening clothes. And she was about to address him when, with a movement as though to forestall her, he leaned forward convulsively and began a mumbling grace.

The dinner itself was more like a ceremony than a meal, and as it proceeded, Honora found it increasingly difficult to rid herself of a curious feeling of being on probation.

Joshua, who sat on her other side and ate prodigiously, scarcely addressed a word to her; but she gathered from his remarks to his father and brother that he was interested in cows. And Mr. Holt was almost exclusively occupied in slowly masticating the special dishes which the butler impressively laid before him. He asked her a few questions about Miss Turner's school, but it was not until she had admired the mass of peonies in the centre of the table that his eyes brightened, and he smiled.

"You like flowers?" he asked.

"I love them," slid Honora.

"I am the gardener here," he said. "You must see my garden, Miss Leffingwell. I am in it by half-past six every morning, rain or shine."

Honora looked up, and surprised Mrs. Robert's eyes fixed on her with the same strange expression she had noticed on her arrival. And for some senseless reason, she flushed.

The conversation was chiefly carried on by kindly little Mrs. Joshua and by Mrs. Holt, who seemed at once to preside and to dominate. She praised Honora's gown, but left a lingering impression that she thought her overdressed, without definitely saying so. And she made innumerable—and often embarrassing—inquiries about Honora's aunt and uncle, and her life in St. Louis, and her friends there, and how she had happened to go to Sutcliffe to school. Sometimes Honora blushed, but she answered them all good-naturedly. And when at length the meal had marched sedately down to the fruit, Mrs. Holt rose and drew Honora out of the dining room.

"It is a little hard on you, my dear," she said, "to give you so much family on your arrival. But there are some other people coming to-morrow, when it will be gayer, I hope, for you and Susan."

"It is so good of you and Susan to want me, Mrs. Holt," replied Honora, "I am enjoying it so much. I have never been in a big country house like this, and I am glad there is no one else here. I have heard my aunt speak of you so often, and tell how kind you were to take charge of me, that I have always hoped to know you sometime or other. And it seems the strangest of coincidences that I should have roomed with Susan at Sutcliffe."

"Susan has grown very fond of you," said Mrs. Holt, graciously. "We are very glad to have you, my dear, and I must own that I had a curiosity to see you again. Your aunt struck me as a good and sensible woman, and it was a positive relief to know that you were to be confided to her care." Mrs. Holt, however, shook her head and regarded Honora, and her next remark might have been taken as a clew to her thoughts. "But we are not very gay at Silverdale, Honora."

Honora's quick intuition detected the implication of a frivolity which even her sensible aunt had not been able to eradicate.

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she cried, "I shall be so happy here, just seeing things and being among you. And I am so interested in the little bit I have seen already. I caught a glimpse of your girls' home on my way from the station. I hope you will take me there."

Mrs. Holt gave her a quick look, but beheld in Honora's clear eyes only eagerness and ingenuousness.

The change in the elderly lady's own expression, and incidentally in the atmosphere which enveloped her, was remarkable.

"Would you really like to go, my dear?"

"Oh, yes indeed," cried Honora. "You see, I have heard so much of it, and I should like to write my aunt about it. She is interested in the work you are doing, and she has kept a magazine with an article in it, and a picture of the institution."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the lady, now visibly pleased. "It is a very modest little work, my dear. I had no idea that—out in St. Louis—that the beams of my little candle had carried so far. Indeed you shall see it, Honora. We will go down the first thing in the morning."

Mrs. Robert, who had been sitting on the other side of the room, rose abruptly and came towards them. There was something very like a smile on her face,—although it wasn't really a smile—as she bent over and kissed her mother-in-law on the cheek.

"I am glad to hear you are interested in—charities, Miss Leffingwell," she said.

Honora's face grew warm.

"I have not so far had very much to do with them, I am afraid," she answered.

"How should she?" demanded Mrs. Holt. "Gwendolen, you're not going up already?"

"I have some letters to write," said Mrs. Robert.

"Gwen has helped me immeasurably," said Mrs. Holt, looking after the tall figure of her daughter-in-law, "but she has a curious, reserved character. You have to know her, my dear. She is not at all like Susan, for instance."

Honora awoke the next morning to a melody, and lay for some minutes in a delicious semi-consciousness, wondering where she was. Presently she discovered that the notes were those of a bird on a tree immediately outside of her window—a tree of wonderful perfection, the lower branches of which swept the ground. Other symmetrical trees, of many varieties, dotted a velvet lawn, which

formed a great natural terrace above the forested valley of Silver Brook. On the grass, dew-drenched cobwebs gleamed in the early sun, and the breeze that stirred the curtains was charged with the damp, fresh odours of the morning. Voices caught her ear, and two figures appeared in the distance. One she recognized as Mr. Holt, and the other was evidently a gardener. The gilt clock on the mantel pointed to a quarter of seven.

It is far too late in this history to pretend that Honora was, by preference, an early riser, and therefore it must have been the excitement caused by her surroundings that made her bathe and dress with alacrity that morning. A housemaid was dusting the stairs as she descended into the empty hall. She crossed the lawn, took a path through the trees that bordered it, and came suddenly upon an old-fashioned garden in all the freshness of its early morning colour. In one of the winding paths she stopped with a little exclamation. Mr. Holt rose from his knees in front of her, where he had been digging industriously with a trowel. His greeting, when contrasted with his comparative taciturnity at dinner the night before, was almost effusive—and a little pathetic.

"My dear young lady," he exclaimed, "up so early?" He held up forbiddingly a mould-covered palm. "I can't shake hands with you."

Honora laughed.

"I couldn't resist the temptation to see your garden," she said.

A gentle light gleamed in his blue eyes, and he paused before a trellis of June roses. With his gardening knife he cut three of them, and held them gallantly against her white gown. Her sensitive colour responded as she thanked him, and she pinned them deftly at her waist.

"You like gardens?" he said.

"I was brought up with them," she answered; "I mean," she corrected herself swiftly, "in a very modest way. My uncle is passionately fond of flowers, and he makes our little yard bloom with them all summer. But of course," Honora added, "I've never seen anything like this."

"It has been a life work," answered Mr. Holt, proudly, "and yet I feel as though I had not yet begun. Come, I will show you the peonies—they are at their best—before I go in and make myself respectable for breakfast."

Ten minutes later, as they approached the house in amicable and even lively conversation, they beheld Susan and Mrs. Robert standing on the steps under the porte-cochere, watching them.

"Why, Honora," cried Susan, "how energetic you are! I actually had a shock when I went to your room and found you'd gone. I'll have to write Miss Turner."

"Don't," pleaded Honora; "you see, I had every inducement to get up."

"She has been well occupied," put in Mr. Holt. "She has been admiring my garden."

"Indeed I have," said Honora.

"Oh, then, you have won father's heart!" cried Susan. Gwendolen Holt smiled. Her eyes were fixed upon the roses in Honora's belt.

"Good morning, Miss Leffingwell," she said, simply.

Mr. Holt having removed the loam from his hands, the whole family, excepting Joshua, Junior, and including an indefinite number of children, and Carroll, the dignified butler, and Martha, the elderly maid, trooped into the library for prayers. Mr. Holt sat down before a teak-wood table at the end of the room, on which reposed a great, morocco-covered Bible. Adjusting his spectacles, he read, in a mild but impressive voice, a chapter of Matthew, while Mrs. Joshua tried to quiet her youngest. Honora sat staring at a figure on the carpet, uncomfortably aware that Mrs. Robert was still studying her. Mr. Holt closed the Bible reverently, and announced a prayer, whereupon the family knelt upon the floor and leaned their elbows on the seats of their chairs. Honora did likewise, wondering at the facility with which Mr. Holt worded his appeal, and at the number of things he found to pray for. Her knees had begun to ache before he had finished.

At breakfast such a cheerful spirit prevailed that Honora began almost to feel at home. Even Robert indulged occasionally in raillery.

"Where in the world is Josh?" asked Mrs. Holt, after they were seated.

"I forgot to tell you, mother," little Mrs. Joshua chirped up, "that he got up at an unearthly hour, and

went over to Grafton to look at a cow."

"A cow!" sighed Mrs. Holt. "Oh, dear, I might have known it. You must understand, Honora, that every member of the Holt family has a hobby. Joshua's is Jerseys."

"I'm sure I should adore them if I lived in the country," Honora declared.

"If you and Joshua would only take that Sylvester farm, and build a house, Annie," said Mr. Holt, munching the dried bread which was specially prepared for him, "I should be completely happy. Then," he added, turning to Honora, "I should have both my sons settled on the place. Robert and Gwen are sensible in building."

"It's cheaper to live with you, granddad," laughed Mrs. Joshua. "Josh says if we do that, he has more money to buy cows."

At this moment a footman entered, and presented Mrs. Holt with some mail on a silver tray.

"The Vicomte de Toqueville is coming this afternoon, Joshua," she announced, reading rapidly from a sheet on which was visible a large crown. "He landed in New York last week, and writes to know if I could have him."

"Another of mother's menagerie," remarked Robert.

"I don't think that's nice of you, Robert," said his mother. "The Vicomte was very kind to your father and me in Paris, and invited us to his chateau in Provence."

Robert was sceptical.

"Are you sure he had one?" he insisted.

Even Mr. Holt laughed.

"Robert," said his mother, "I wish Gwen could induce you to travel more. Perhaps you would learn that all foreigners aren't fortune-hunters."

I've had an opportunity to observe the ones who come over here, mother."

"I won't have a prospective guest discussed," Mrs. Holt declared, with finality. "Joshua, you remember my telling you last spring that Martha Spence's son called on me?" she asked. "He is in business with a man named Dallam, I believe, and making a great deal of money for a young man. He is just a year younger than you, Robert."

"Do you mean that fat, tow-headed boy that used to come up here and eat melons and ride my pony?" inquired Robert. "Howard Spence?"

Mrs. Holt smiled.

"He isn't fat any longer, Robert. Indeed, he's quite good-looking. Since his mother died, I had lost trace of him. But I found a photograph of hers when I was clearing up my desk some months ago, and sent it to him, and he came to thank me. I forgot to tell you that I invited him for a fortnight any time he chose, and he has just written to ask if he may come now. I regret to say that he's on the Stock Exchange—but I was very fond of his mother. It doesn't seem to me quite a legitimate business."

"Why!" exclaimed little Mrs. Joshua, unexpectedly, "I'm given to understand that the Stock Exchange is quite aristocratic in these days."

"I'm afraid I am old-fashioned, my dear," said Mrs. Holt, rising. "It has always seemed to me little better than a gambling place. Honora, if you still wish to go to the Girls' Home, I have ordered the carriage in a quarter of an hour."

## CHAPTER VIII

### A CHAPTER OF CONQUESTS

Honora's interest in the Institution was so lively, and she asked so many questions and praised so

highly the work with which the indiscreet young women were occupied that Mrs. Holt patted her hand as they drove homeward.

"My dear," she said, "I begin to wish I'd adopted you myself. Perhaps, later on, we can find a husband for you, and you will marry and settle down near us here at Silverdale, and then you can help me with the work."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she replied, "I should so like to help you, I mean. And it would be wonderful to live in such a place. And as for marriage, it seems such a long way off that somehow I never think of it."

"Naturally," ejaculated Mrs. Holt, with approval, "a young girl of your age should not. But, my dear, I am afraid you are destined to have many admirers. If you had not been so well brought up, and were not naturally so sensible, I should fear for you."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt!" exclaimed Honora, deprecatingly, and blushing very prettily.

"Whatever else I am," said Mrs. Holt, vigorously, "I am not a flatterer. I am telling you something for your own good—which you probably know already."

Honora was discreetly silent. She thought of the proud and unsusceptible George Hanbury, whom she had cast down from the tower of his sophomore dignity with such apparent ease; and of certain gentlemen at home, young and middle-aged, who had behaved foolishly during the Christmas holidays.

At lunch both the Roberts and the Joshuas were away.

Afterwards, they romped with the children—she and Susan. They were shy at first, especially the third Joshua, but Honora captivated him by playing two sets of tennis in the broiling sun, at the end of which exercise he regarded her with a new-born admiration in his eyes. He was thirteen.

"I didn't think you were that kind at all," he said.

"What kind did you think I was?" asked Honora, passing her arm around his shoulder as they walked towards the house.

The boy grew scarlet.

"Oh, I didn't think you—you could play tennis," he stammered.

Honora stopped, and seized his chin and tilted his face upward.

"Now, Joshua," she said, "look at me and say that over again."

"Well," he replied desperately, "I thought you wouldn't want to get all mussed up and hot."

"That's better," said Honora. "You thought I was vain, didn't you?"

"But I don't think so any more," he avowed passionately. "I think you're a trump. And we'll play again to-morrow, won't we?"

"We'll play any day you like," she declared.

It is unfair to suppose that the arrival of a real vicomte and of a young, good-looking, and successful member of the New York Stock Exchange were responsible for Honora's appearance, an hour later, in the embroidered linen gown which Cousin Eleanor had given her that spring. Tea was already in progress on the porch, and if a hush in the conversation and the scraping of chairs is any sign of a sensation, this happened when our heroine appeared in the doorway. And Mrs. Holt, in the act of lifting the hot-water kettle; put it down again. Whether or not there was approval in the lady's delft-blue eye, Honora could not have said. The Vicomte, with the graceful facility of his race, had differentiated himself from the group and stood before her. As soon as the words of introduction were pronounced, he made a bow that was a tribute in itself, exaggerated in its respect.

"It is a pleasure, Mademoiselle," he murmured, but his eyes were more eloquent.

A description of him in his own language leaped into Honora's mind, so much did he appear to have walked out of one of the many yellow-backed novels she had read. He was not tall, but beautifully made, and his coat was quite absurdly cut in at the waist; his mustache was en-croc, and its points resembled those of the Spanish bayonets in the conservatory: he might have been three and thirty, and he was what the novels described as 'un peu fane' which means that he had seen the world: his eyes were extraordinarily bright, black, and impenetrable.



A greater contrast to the Vicomte than Mr. Howard Spence would have been difficult to find. He was Honora's first glimpse of Finance, of the powers that travelled in private cars and despatched ships across the ocean. And in our modern mythology, he might have stood for the god of Prosperity. Prosperity is pink, and so was Mr. Spence, in two places, —his smooth-shaven cheeks and his shirt. His flesh had a certain firmness, but he was not stout; he was merely well fed, as Prosperity should be. His features were comparatively regular, his mustache a light brown, his eyes hazel. The fact that he came from that mysterious metropolis, the heart of which is Wall Street, not only excused but legitimized the pink shirt and the neatly knotted green tie, the pepper-and-salt check suit that was loose and at the same time well-fitting, and the jewelled ring on his plump little finger. On the whole, Mr. Spence was not only prepossessing, but he contrived to give Honora, as she shook his hand, the impression of being brought a step nearer to the national source of power. Unlike the Vicomte, he did not appear to have been instantly and mortally wounded upon her arrival on the scene, but his greeting was flattering, and he remained by her side instead of returning to that of Mrs. Robert.

"When did you come up?" he asked.

"Only yesterday," answered Honora.

"New York," said Mr. Spence, producing a gold cigarette case on which his monogram was largely and somewhat elaborately engraved, "New York is played out this time of year—isn't it? I dropped in at Sherry's last night for dinner, and there weren't thirty people there."

Honora had heard of Sherry's as a restaurant where one dined fabulously, and she tried to imagine the cosmopolitan and blissful existence which permitted "dropping in at" such a place. Moreover, Mr. Spence was plainly under the impression that she too "came up" from New York, and it was impossible not to be a little pleased.

"It must be a relief to get into the country," she ventured.

Mr. Spence glanced around him expressively, and then looked at her with a slight smile. The action and the smile—to which she could not refrain from responding—seemed to establish a tacit understanding between them. It was natural that he should look upon Silverdale as a slow place, and there was something delicious in his taking, for granted that she shared this opinion. She wondered a little wickedly what he would say when he knew the truth about her, and this was the birth of a resolution that his interest should not flag.

"Oh, I can stand the country when it is properly inhabited," he said, and their eyes met in laughter.

"How many inhabitants do you require?" she asked.

"Well," he said brazenly, "the right kind of inhabitant is worth a thousand of the wrong kind. It is a good rule in business, when you come across a gilt-edged security, to make a specialty of it."

Honora found the compliment somewhat singular. But she was prepared to forgive New York a few sins in the matter of commercial slang: New York, which evidently dressed as it liked, and talked as it liked. But not knowing any more of a gilt-edged security than that it was something to Mr. Spence's taste, a retort was out of the question. Then, as though she were doomed that day to complicity, her eyes chanced to encounter an appealing glance from the Vicomte, who was searching with the courage of despair for an English word, which his hostess awaited in stoical silence. He was trying to give his impressions of Silverdale, in comparison to country places abroad, while Mrs. Robert regarded him enigmatically, and Susan sympathetically. Honora had an almost irresistible desire to laugh.

"Ah, Madame," he cried, still looking at Honora, "will you have the kindness to permit me to walk about ever so little?"

"Certainly, Vicomte, and I will go with you. Get my parasol, Susan. Perhaps you would like to come, too, Howard," she added to Mr. Spence; "it has been so long since you were here, and we have made many changes."

"And you, Mademoiselle," said the Vicomte to Honora, "you will come—yes? You are interested in landscape?"

"I love the country," said Honora.

"It is a pleasure to have a guest who is so appreciative," said Mrs. Holt. "Miss Leffingwell was up at seven this morning, and in the garden with my husband."

"At seven!" exclaimed the Vicomte; "you American young ladies are wonderful. For example—" and he was about to approach her to enlarge on this congenial theme when Susan arrived with the parasol,

which Mrs. Holt put in his hands.

"We'll begin, I think, with the view from the summer house," she said. "And I will show you how our famous American landscape architect, Mr. Olmstead, has treated the slope."

There was something humorous, and a little pathetic in the contrasted figures of the Vicomte and their hostess crossing the lawn in front of them. Mr. Spence paused a moment to light his cigarette, and he seemed to derive infinite pleasure from this juxtaposition.

"Got left,—didn't he?" he said.

To this observation there was, obviously, no answer.

"I'm not very strong on foreigners," he declared. "An American is good enough for me. And there's something about that fellow which would make me a little slow in trusting him with a woman I cared for."

"If you are beginning to worry over Mrs. Holt," said Honora, "we'd better walk a little faster."

Mr. Spence's delight at this sally was so unrestrained as to cause the couple ahead to turn. The Vicomte's expression was reproachful.

"Where's Susan?" asked Mrs. Holt.

"I think she must have gone in the house," Honora answered.

"You two seem to be having a very good time."

"Oh, we're hitting it off fairly well," said Mr. Spence, no doubt for the benefit of the Vicomte. And he added in a confidential tone, "Aren't we?"

"Not on the subject of the Vicomte," she replied promptly. "I like him. I like French people."

"What!" he exclaimed, halting in his steps, "you don't take that man seriously?"

"I haven't known him long enough to take him seriously," said Honora.

"There's a blindness about women," he declared, "that's incomprehensible. They'll invest in almost any old thing if the certificates are beautifully engraved. If you were a man, you wouldn't trust that Frenchman to give you change for five dollars."

"French people," proclaimed Honora, "have a light touch of which we Americans are incapable. We do not know how to relax."

"A light touch!" cried Mr. Spence, delightedly, "that about describes the Vicomte."

"I'm sure you do him an injustice," said Honora.

"We'll see," said Mr. Spence. "Mrs. Holt is always picking up queer people like that. She's noted for it." He turned to her. "How did you happen to come here?"

"I came with Susan," she replied, amusedly, "from boarding-school at Sutcliffe."

"From boarding-school!"

She rather enjoyed his surprise.

"You don't mean to say you are Susan's age?"

"How old did you think I was?" she asked.

"Older than Susan," he said surveying her.

"No, I'm a mere child, I'm nineteen."

"But I thought—" he began, and paused and lighted another cigarette.

Her eyes lighted mischievously.

"You thought that I had been out several years, and that I'd seen a good deal of the world, and that I lived in New York, and that it was strange you didn't know me. But New York is such an enormous place I suppose one can't know everybody there."

"And—where do you come from, if I may ask?" he said.

"St. Louis. I was brought to this country before I was two years old, from France. Mrs. Holt brought me. And I have never been out of St. Louis since, except to go to Sutcliffe. There you have my history. Mrs. Holt would probably have told it to you, if I hadn't."

"And Mrs. Holt brought you to this country?"

Honora explained, not without a certain enjoyment.

"And how do you happen to be here?" she demanded. "Are you a member of —of the menagerie?"

He had the habit of throwing back his head when he laughed. This, of course, was a thing to laugh over, and now he deemed it audacity. Five minutes before he might have given it another name there is no use in saying that the recital of Honora's biography had not made a difference with Mr. Howard Pence, and that he was not a little mortified at his mistake. What he had supposed her to be must remain a matter of conjecture. He was, however, by no means aware how thoroughly this unknown and inexperienced young woman had read his thoughts in her regard. And if the truth be told, he was on the whole relieved that she was nobody. He was just an ordinary man, provided with no sixth sense or premonitory small voice to warn him that masculine creatures are often in real danger at the moment when they feel most secure.

It is certain that his manner changed, and during the rest of the walk she listened demurely when he talked about Wall Street, with casual references to the powers that be. It was evident that Mr. Howard Spence was one who had his fingers on the pulse of affairs. Ambition leaped in him.

They reached the house in advance of Mrs. Holt and the Vicomte, and Honora went to her room.

At dinner, save for a little matter of a casual remark when Mr. Holt had assumed the curved attitude in which he asked grace, Mr. Spence had a veritable triumph. Self-confidence was a quality which Honora admired. He was undaunted by Mrs. Holt, and advised Mrs. Robert, if she had any pin-money, to buy New York Central; and he predicted an era of prosperity which would be unexampled in the annals of the country. Among other powers, he quoted the father of Honora's schoolmate, Mr. James Wing, as authority for this prophecy. He sat next to Susan, who maintained her usual maidenly silence, but Honora, from time to time, and as though by accident, caught his eye. Even Mr. Holt, when not munching his dried bread, was tempted to make some inquiries about the market.

"So far as I am concerned," Mrs. Holt announced suddenly, "nothing can convince me that it is not gambling."

"My dear Elvira!" protested Mr. Holt.

"I can't help it," said that lady, stoutly; "I'm old-fashioned, I suppose. But it seems to me like legalized gambling."

Mr. Spence took this somewhat severe arraignment of his career in admirable good nature. And if these be such a thing as an implied wink, Honora received one as he proceeded to explain what he was pleased to call the bona-fide nature of the transactions of Dallam and Spence.

A discussion ensued in which, to her surprise, even the ordinarily taciturn Joshua took a part, and maintained that the buying and selling of blooded stock was equally gambling. To this his father laughingly agreed. The Vicomte, who sat on Mrs. Holt's right, and who apparently was determined not to suffer a total eclipse without a struggle, gallantly and unexpectedly came to his hostess' rescue, though she treated him as a doubtful ally. This was because he declared with engaging frankness that in France the young men of his monde had a jeunesse: he, who spoke to them, had gambled; everybody gambled in France, where it was regarded as an innocent amusement. He had friends on the Bourse, and he could see no difference in principle between betting on the red at Monte Carlo and the rise and fall of the shares of la Compagnie des Metaux, for example. After completing his argument, he glanced triumphantly about the table, until his restless black eyes encountered Honora's, seemingly seeking a verdict. She smiled impartially.

The subject of finance lasted through the dinner, and the Vicomte proclaimed himself amazed with the evidences of wealth which confronted him on every side in this marvellous country. And once, when

he was at a loss for a word, Honora astonished and enchanted him by supplying it.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he exclaimed, "I was sure when I first beheld you that you spoke my language! And with such an accent!"

"I have studied it all my life, Vicomte," she said, modestly, "and I had the honour to be born in your country. I have always wished to see it again."

Monsieur de Toqueville ventured the fervent hope that her wish might soon be gratified, but not before he returned to France. He expressed himself in French, and in a few moments she found herself deep in a discussion with him in that tongue. While she talked, her veins seemed filled with fire; and she was dimly and automatically aware of the disturbance about her, as though she were creating a magnetic storm that interfered with all other communication. Mr. Holt's nightly bezique, which he played with Susan, did not seem to be going as well as usual, and elsewhere conversation was a palpable pretence. Mr. Spence, who was attempting to entertain the two daughters-in-law, was clearly distraught—if his glances meant anything. Robert and Joshua had not appeared, and Mrs. Holt, at the far end of the room under the lamp, regarded Honora from time to time over the edge of the evening newspaper.

In his capacity as a student of American manners, an unsuspected if scattered knowledge on Honora's part of that portion of French literature included between Theophile Gautier and Gyp at once dumfounded and delighted the Vicomte de Toqueville. And he was curious to know whether, amongst American young ladies, Miss Leffingwell was the exception or the rule. Those eyes of his, which had paid to his hostess a tender respect, snapped when they spoke to our heroine, and presently he boldly abandoned literature to declare that the fates alone had sent her to Silverdale at the time of his visit.

It was at this interesting juncture that Mrs. Holt rattled her newspaper a little louder than usual, arose majestically, and addressed Mrs. Joshua.

"Annie, perhaps you will play for us," she said, as she crossed the room, and added to Honora: "I had no idea you spoke French so well, my dear. What have you and Monsieur de Toqueville been talking about?"

It was the Vicomte who, springing to his feet, replied nimbly:  
"Mademoiselle has been teaching me much of the customs of your country."

"And what," inquired Mrs. Holt, "have you been teaching Mademoiselle?"

The Vicomte laughed and shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Ah, Madame, I wish I were qualified to be her teacher. The education of American young ladies is truly extraordinary."

"I was about to tell Monsieur de Toqueville," put in Honora, wickedly, "that he must see your Institution as soon as possible, and the work your girls are doing."

"Madame," said the Vicomte, after a scarcely perceptible pause, "I await my opportunity and your kindness."

"I will take you to-morrow," said Mrs. Holt.

At this instant a sound closely resembling a sneeze caused them to turn. Mr. Spence, with his handkerchief to his mouth, had his back turned to them, and was studiously regarding the bookcases.

After Honora had gone upstairs for the night she opened her door in response to a knock, to find Mrs. Holt on the threshold.

"My dear," said that lady, "I feel that I must say a word to you. I suppose you realize that you are attractive to men."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt."

"You're no fool, my dear, and it goes without saying that you do realize it—in the most innocent way, of course. But you have had no experience in life. Mind you, I don't say that the Vicomte de Toqueville isn't very much of a gentleman, but the French ideas about the relations of young men and young women are quite different and, I regret to say, less innocent than ours. I have no reason to believe that the Vicomte has come to this country to—m mend his fortunes. I know nothing about his property. But my sense of responsibility towards you has led me to tell him that you have no dot, for you somehow manage to give the impression of a young woman of fortune. Not purposely, my dear—I did not mean

that." Mrs. Holt tapped gently Honora's flaming cheek. "I merely felt it my duty to drop you a word of warning against Monsieur de Toqueville —because he is a Frenchman."

"But, Mrs. Holt, I had no idea of—of falling in love with him," protested Honora, as soon as she could get her breath. He seemed so kind —and so interested in everything.

"I dare say," said Mrs. Holt, dryly. "And I have always been led to believe that that is the most dangerous sort. I am sure, Honora, after what I have said, you will give him no encouragement."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," cried Honora again, "I shouldn't think of such a thing!"

"I am sure of it, Honora, now that you are forewarned. And your suggestion to take him to the Institution was not a bad one. I meant to do so anyway, and I think it will be good for him. Good night, my dear."

After the good lady had gone, Honora stood for some moments motionless. Then she turned out the light.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN WHICH THE VICOMTE CONTINUES HIS STUDIES

Mr. Robert Holt, Honora learned at breakfast, had two bobbies. She had never heard of what is called Forestry, and had always believed the wood of her country to be inexhaustible. It had never occurred to her to think of a wild forest as an example of nature's extravagance, and so flattering was her attention while Robert explained the primary principles of caring for trees that he actually offered to show her one of the tracts on the estate which he was treating. He could not,—he regretted to say, take her that morning.

His other hobby was golf. He was president of the Sutton Golf Club, and had arranged to play a match with Mr. Spence. This gentleman, it appeared, was likewise an enthusiast, and had brought to Silverdale a leather bag filled with sticks.

"Won't you come, too, Miss Leffingwell?" he said, as he took a second cup of coffee.

Somewhat to the astonishment of the Holt family, Robert seconded the invitation.

"I'll bet, Robert," said Mr. Spence, gallantly, "that Miss Leffingwell can put it over both of us."

"Indeed, I can't play at all," exclaimed Honora in confusion. "And I shouldn't think of spoiling your match. And besides, I am going to drive with Susan."

"We can go another day, Honora," said Susan.

But Honora would not hear of it.

"Come over with me this afternoon, then," suggested Mr. Spence, "and I'll give you a lesson."

She thanked him gratefully.

"But it won't be much fun for you, I'm afraid," she added, as they left the dining room.

"Don't worry about me," he answered cheerfully. He was dressed in a checked golf costume, and wore a pink shirt of a new pattern. And he stood in front of her in the hall, glowing from his night's sleep, evidently in a high state of amusement.

"What's the matter?" she demanded.

"You did for the Vicomte all right," he said. "I'd give a good deal to see him going through the Institution."

"It wouldn't have hurt you, either," she retorted, and started up the stairs. Once she glanced back and saw him looking after her.

At the far end of the second story hall she perceived the Vicomte, who had not appeared at breakfast,

coming out of his room. She paused with her hand on the walnut post and laughed a little, so ludicrous was his expression as he approached her.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, que vous etes mechante!" he exclaimed. "But I forgive you, if you will not go off with that stock-broker. It must be that I see the Home sometime, and if I go now it is over. I forgive you. It is in the Bible that we must forgive our neighbour—how many times?"

"Seventy times seven," said Honora.

"But I make a condition," said the Vicomte, "that my neighbour shall be a woman, and young and beautiful. Then I care not how many times. Mademoiselle, if you would but have your portrait painted as you are, with your hand on the post, by Sargent or Carolus Duran, there would be some noise in the Salon."

"Is that you, Vicomte?" came a voice from the foot of the stairs—Mrs. Holt's voice.

"I come this instant, Madame," he replied, looking over the banisters, and added: "malheureux que je suis! Perhaps, when I return, you will show me a little of the garden."

The duty of exhibiting to guests the sights of Silverdale and the neighbourhood had so often devolved upon Susan, who was methodical, that she had made out a route, or itinerary, for this purpose. There were some notes to leave and a sick woman and a child to see, which caused her to vary it a little that morning; and Honora, who sat in the sunlight and held the horse, wondered how it would feel to play the lady bountiful. "I am so glad to have you all to myself for a little while, Honora," Susan said to her. "You are so popular that I begin to fear that I shall have to be unselfish, and share you."

"Oh, Susan," she said, "every one has been so kind. And I can't tell you how much I am enjoying this experience, which I feel I owe to you."

"I am so happy, dear, that it is giving you pleasure," said Susan.

"And don't think," exclaimed Honora, "that you won't see lots of me, for you will."

Her heart warmed to Susan, yet she could not but feel a secret pity for her, as one unable to make the most of her opportunities in the wonderful neighbourhood in which she lived. As they drove through the roads and in and out of the well-kept places, everybody they met had a bow and a smile for her friend—a greeting such as people give to those for whom they have only good-will. Young men and girls waved their racquets at her from the tennis-courts; and Honora envied them and wished that she, too, were a part of the gay life she saw, and were playing instead of being driven decorously about. She admired the trim, new houses in which they lived, set upon the slopes of the hills. Pleasure houses, they seemed to her, built expressly for joys which had been denied her.

"Do you see much of—of these people, Susan?" she asked.

"Not so much as I'd like," replied Susan, seriously. "I never seem to get time. We nearly always have guests at Silverdale, and then there are so many things one has to attend to. Perhaps you have noticed," she added, smiling a little, "that we are very serious and old-fashioned."

"Oh, no indeed," protested Honora. "It is such a wonderful experience for me to be here!"

"Well," said Susan, "we're having some young people to dinner to-night, and others next week—that's why I'm leaving these notes. And then we shall be a little livelier."

"Really, Susan, you mustn't think that I'm not having a good time. It is exciting to be in the same house with a real French Vicomte, and I like Mr. Spence tremendously."

Her friend was silent.

"Don't you?" demanded Honora.

To her surprise, the usually tolerant Susan did not wholly approve of Mr. Spence.

"He is a guest, and I ought not to criticise him," she answered. "But since you ask me, Honora, I have to be honest. It seems to me that his ambitions are a little sordid—that he is too intent upon growing rich."

"But I thought all New Yorkers were that way," exclaimed Honora, and added hastily, "except a few, like your family, Susan."

Susan laughed.

"You should marry a diplomat, my dear," she said. "After all, perhaps I am a little harsh. But there is a spirit of selfishness and—and of vulgarity in modern, fashionable New York which appears to be catching, like a disease. The worship of financial success seems to be in every one's blood."

"It is power," said Honora.

Susan glanced at her, but Honora did not remark the expression on her friend's face, so intent was she on the reflections which Susan's words had aroused. They had reached the far end of the Silverdale domain, and were driving along the shore of the lake that lay like a sapphire set amongst the green hills. It was here that the new house of the Robert Holts was building. Presently they came to Joshua's dairy farm, and Joshua himself was standing in the doorway of one of his immaculate barn Honora put her hand on Susan's arm.

"Can't we see the cows?" she asked.

Susan looked surprised.

"I didn't know you were interested in cows, Honora."

"I am interested in everything," said Honora: "and I think your brother is so attractive."

It was at this moment that Joshua, with his hands in his pockets, demanded what his sister was doing there.

"Miss Leffingwell wants to look at the cattle, Josh," called Susan.

"Won't you show them to me, Mr. Holt," begged Honora. "I'd like so much to see some really good cattle, and to know a little more about them."

Joshua appeared incredulous. But, being of the male sex, he did not hide the fact that he was pleased, "it seems strange to have somebody really want to see them," he said. "I tried to get Spence to come back this way, but the idea didn't seem to appeal to him. Here are some of the records."

"Records?" repeated Honora, looking at a mass of typewritten figures on the wall. "Do you mean to say you keep such an exact account of all the milk you get?"

Joshua laughed, and explained. She walked by his side over the concrete paving to the first of the varnished stalls.

"That," he said, and a certain pride had come into his voice, "is Lady Guinevere, and those ribbons are the prizes she has taken on both sides of the water."

"Isn't she a dear!" exclaimed Honora; "why, she's actually beautiful. I didn't know cows could be so beautiful."

"She isn't bad," admitted Joshua. "Of course the good points in a cow aren't necessarily features of beauty for instance, these bones here," he added, pointing to the hips.

"But they seem to add, somehow, to the thoroughbred appearance," Honora declared.

"That's absolutely true," replied Joshua,—whereupon he began to talk.

And Honora, still asking questions, followed him from stall to stall.

"There are some more in the pasture," he said, when they had reached the end of the second building.

"Oh, couldn't I see them?" she asked.

"Surely," replied Joshua, with more of alacrity than one would have believed him capable. "I'll tell Susan to drive on, and you and I will walk home across the fields, if you like."

"I should love to," said Honora.

It was not without astonishment that the rest of the Holt family beheld them returning together as the gongs were sounding for luncheon. Mrs. Holt, upon perceiving them, began at once to shake her head and laugh.

"My dear, it can't be that you have captivated Joshua!" she exclaimed, in a tone that implied the carrying of a stronghold hitherto thought impregnable.

Honora blushed, whether from victory or embarrassment, or both, it is impossible to say.

"I'm afraid it's just the other way, Mrs. Holt," she replied; "Mr. Holt has captivated me."

"We'll call it mutual, Miss Leffingwell," declared Joshua, which was for him the height of gallantry.

"I only hope he hasn't bored you," said the good-natured Mrs. Joshua.

"Oh, dear, no," exclaimed Honora. "I don't see how any one could be bored looking at such magnificent animals as that Hardicanute."

It was at this moment that her eyes were drawn, by a seemingly resistless attraction, to Mrs. Robert's face. Her comment upon this latest conquest, though unexpressed, was disquieting. And in spite of herself, Honora blushed again.

At luncheon, in the midst of a general conversation, Mr. Spence made a remark sotto voce which should, in the ordinary course of events, have remained a secret.

"Susan," he said, "your friend Miss Leffingwell is a fascinator. She's got Robert's scalp, too, and he thought it a pretty good joke because I offered to teach her to play golf this afternoon."

It appeared that Susan's eyes could flash indignantly. Perhaps she resented Mr. Spence's calling her by her first name.

"Honora Leffingwell is the most natural and unspoiled person I know," she said.

There is, undoubtedly, a keen pleasure and an ample reward in teaching a pupil as apt and as eager to learn as Honora. And Mr. Spence, if he attempted at all to account for the swiftness with which the hours of that long afternoon slipped away, may have attributed their flight to the discovery in himself of hitherto latent talent for instruction. At the little Casino, he had bought, from the professional in charge of the course, a lady's driver; and she practised with exemplary patience the art of carrying one's hands through and of using the wrists in the stroke.

"Not quite, Miss Leffingwell," he would say, "but so."

Honora would try again.

"That's unusually good for a beginner, but you are inclined to chop it off a little still. Let it swing all the way round."

"Oh, dear, how you must hate me!"

"Hate you?" said Mr. Spence, searching in vain for words with which to obliterate such a false impression. "Anything but that!"

"Isn't it a wonderful, spot?" she exclaimed, gazing off down the swale, emerald green in the afternoon light between its forest walls. In the distance, Silver Brook was gleaming amidst the meadows. They sat down on one of the benches and watched the groups of players pass. Mr. Spence produced his cigarette case, and presented it to her playfully.

"A little quiet whiff," he suggested. "There's not much chance over at the convent," and she gathered that it was thus he was pleased to designate Silverdale.

In one instant she was doubtful whether or not to be angry, and in the next grew ashamed of the provincialism which had caused her to suspect an insult. She took a cigarette, and he produced a gold match case, lighted a match, and held it up for her. Honora blew it out.

"You didn't think seriously that I smoked?" she asked, glancing at him.

"Why not?" he asked; "any number of girls do."

She tore away some of the rice paper and lifted the tobacco to her nose, and made a little grimace.

"Do you like to see women smoke?" she asked.

Mr. Spence admitted that there was something cosy about the custom, when it was well done.

"And I imagine," he added, "that you'd do it well."

"I'm sure I should make a frightful mess of it," she protested modestly.



"You do everything well," he said.

"Even golf?" she inquired mischievously.

"Even golf, for a beginner and—and a woman; you've got the swing in an astonishingly short time. In fact, you've been something of an eye-opener to me," he declared. "If I had been betting, I should have placed the odds about twenty to one against your coming from the West."

This Eastern complacency, although it did not lower Mr. Spence in her estimation, aroused Honora's pride.

"That shows how little New Yorkers know of the West," she replied, laughing. "Didn't you suppose there were any gentlewomen there?"

"Gentlewomen," repeated Mr. Spence, as though puzzled by the word, "gentlewomen, yes. But you might have been born anywhere."

Even her sense of loyalty to her native place was not strong enough to override this compliment.

"I like a girl with some dash and go to her," he proclaimed, and there could be no doubt about the one to whom he was attributing these qualities. "Savoir faire, as the French call it, and all that. I don't know much about that language, but the way you talk it makes Mrs. Holt's French and Susan's sound silly. I watched you last night when you were stringing the Vicomte."

"Oh, did you?" said Honora, demurely.

"You may have thought I was talking to Mrs. Robert," he said.

"I wasn't thinking anything about you," replied Honora, indignantly. "And besides, I wasn't I stringing' the Vicomte. In the West we don't use anything like so much slang as you seem to use in New York."

"Oh, come now!" he exclaimed, laughingly, and apparently not the least out of countenance, "you made him think he was the only pebble on the beach. I have no idea what you were talking about."

"Literature," she said. "Perhaps that was the reason why you couldn't understand it."

"He may be interested in literature," replied Mr. Spence, "but it wouldn't be a bad guess to say that he was more interested in stocks and bonds."

"He doesn't talk about them, at any rate," said Honora.

"I'd respect him more if he did," he announced. "I know those fellows—they make love to every woman they meet. I saw him eying you at lunch."

Honora laughed.

"I imagine the Vicomte could make love charmingly," she said.

Mr. Spence suddenly became very solemn.

"Merely as a fellow-countryman, Miss Leffingwell—" he began, when she sprang to her feet, her eyes dancing, and finished the sentence.

"You would advise me to be on my guard against him, because, although I look twenty-five and experienced, I am only nineteen and inexperienced. Thank you."

He paused to light another cigarette before he followed her across the turf. But she had the incomprehensible feminine satisfaction of knowing, as they walked homeward, that the usual serenity of his disposition was slightly ruffled.

A sudden caprice impelled her, in the privacy of her bedroom that evening, to draw his portrait for Peter Erwin. The complacency of New York men was most amusing, she wrote, and the amount of slang they used would have been deemed vulgar in St. Louis. Nevertheless, she liked people to be sure of themselves, and there was something "insolent" about New York which appealed to her. Peter, when he read that letter, seemed to see Mr. Howard Spence in the flesh; or arrayed, rather, in the kind of cloth alluringly draped in the show-windows of fashionable tailors. For Honora, all unconsciously, wrote literature. Literature was invented before phonographs, and will endure after them. Peter could hear Mr. Spence talk, for a part of that gentleman's conversation—a characteristic part—was faithfully transcribed. And Peter detected a strain of admiration running even through the ridicule.

Peter showed that letter to Aunt Mary, whom it troubled, and to Uncle Tom, who laughed over it. There was also a lifelike portrait of the Vicomte, followed by the comment that he was charming, but very French; but the meaning of this last, but quite obvious, attribute remained obscure. He was possessed of one of the oldest titles and one of the oldest chateaux in France. (Although she did not say so, Honora had this on no less authority than that of the Vicomte himself.) Mrs. Holt—with her Victorian brooch and ear-rings and her watchful delft-blue eyes that somehow haunted one even when she was out of sight, with her ample bosom and the really kind heart it contained—was likewise depicted; and Mr. Holt, with his dried bread, and his garden which Honora wished Uncle Tom could see, and his prayers that lacked imagination. Joshua and his cows, Robert and his forest, Susan and her charities, the Institution, jolly Mrs. Joshua and enigmatical Mrs. Robert—all were there: and even a picture of the dinner-party that evening, when Honora sat next to a young Mr. Patterson with glasses and a studious manner, who knew George Hanbury at Harvard. The other guests were a florid Miss Chamberlin, whose person loudly proclaimed possessions, and a thin Miss Longman, who rented one of the Silverdale cottages and sketched.

Honora was seeing life. She sent her love to Peter, and begged him to write to her.

The next morning a mysterious change seemed to have passed over the members of the family during the night. It was Sunday. Honora, when she left her room, heard a swishing on the stairs—Mrs. Joshua, stiffly arrayed for the day. Even Mrs. Robert swished, but Mrs. Holt, in a bronze-coloured silk, swished most of all as she entered the library after a brief errand to the housekeeper's room. Mr. Holt was already arranging his book-marks in the Bible, while Joshua and Robert, in black cutaways that seemed to have the benumbing and paralyzing effect of strait-jackets, wandered aimlessly about the room, as though its walls were the limit of their movements. The children had a subdued and touch-me-not air that reminded Honora of her own youth.

It was not until prayers were over and the solemn gathering seated at the breakfast table that Mr. Spence burst upon it like an aurora. His flannel suit was of the lightest of grays; he wore white tennis shoes and a red tie, and it was plain, as he cheerfully bade them good morning, that he was wholly unaware of the enormity of his costume. There was a choking, breathless moment before Mrs. Holt broke the silence.

"Surely, Howard," she said, "you're not going to church in those clothes."

"I hadn't thought of going to church," replied Mr. Spence, helping himself to cherries.

"What do you intend to do?" asked his hostess.

"Read the stock reports for the week as soon as the newspapers arrive."

"There is no such thing as a Sunday newspaper in my house," said Mrs. Holt.

"No Sunday newspapers!" he exclaimed. And his eyes, as they encountered Honora's,—who sought to avoid them,—expressed a genuine dismay.

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Holt, "that I was right when I spoke of the pernicious effect of Wall Street upon young men. Your mother did not approve of Sunday newspapers."

During the rest of the meal, although he made a valiant attempt to hold his own, Mr. Spence was, so to speak, outlawed. Robert and Joshua must have had a secret sympathy for him. One of them mentioned the Vicomte.

"The Vicomte is a foreigner," declared Mrs. Holt. "I am in no sense responsible for him."

The Vicomte was at that moment propped up in bed, complaining to his valet about the weakness of the coffee. He made the remark (which he afterwards repeated to Honora) that weak coffee and the Protestant religion seemed inseparable; but he did not attempt to discover the whereabouts, in Sutton, of the Church of his fathers. He was not in the best of humours that morning, and his toilet had advanced no further when, an hour or so later, he perceived from behind his lace curtains Mr. Howard Spence, dressed with comparative soberness, handing Honora into the omnibus. The incident did not serve to improve the cynical mood in which the Vicomte found himself.

Indeed, the Vicomte, who had a theory concerning Mr. Spence's church-going, was not far from wrong. As may have been suspected, it was to Honora that credit was due. It was Honora whom Mr. Spence sought after breakfast, and to whom he declared that her presence alone prevented him from leaving that afternoon. It was Honora who told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself. And it was to Honora, after church was over and they were walking homeward together along the dusty road, that

Mr. Spence remarked by way of a delicate compliment that "the morning had not been a total loss, after all!"

The little Presbyterian church stood on a hillside just outside of the village and was, as far as possible, the possession of the Holt family. The morning sunshine illuminated the angels in the Holt memorial window, and the inmates of the Holt Institution occupied all the back pews. Mrs. Joshua played the organ, and Susan, with several young women and a young man with a long coat and plastered hair, sang in the choir. The sermon of the elderly minister had to do with beliefs rather than deeds, and was the subject of discussion at luncheon.

"It is very like a sermon I found in my room," said Honora.

"I left that book in your room, my dear, in the hope that you would not overlook it," said Mrs. Holt, approvingly. "Joshua, I wish you would read that sermon aloud to us."

"Oh, do, Mr. Holt!" begged Honora.

The Vicomte, who had been acting very strangely during the meal, showed unmistakable signs of a futile anger. He had asked Honora to walk with him.

"Of course," added Mrs. Holt, "no one need listen who doesn't wish to. Since you were good enough to reconsider your decision and attend divine service, Howard, I suppose I should be satisfied."

The reading took place in the library. Through the open window Honora perceived the form of Joshua asleep in the hammock, his Sunday coat all twisted under him. It worried her to picture his attire when he should wake up. Once Mrs. Robert looked in, smiled, said nothing, and went out again. At length, in a wicker chair under a distant tree on the lawn, Honora beheld the dejected outline of the Vicomte. He was trying to read, but every once in a while would lay down his book and gaze protractedly at the house, stroking his mustache. The low song of the bees around the shrubbery vied with Mr. Holt's slow reading. On the whole, the situation delighted Honora, who bit her lip to refrain from smiling at M. de Toqueville. When at last she emerged from the library, he rose precipitately and came towards her across the lawn, lifting his hands towards the pitiless puritan skies.

"Enfin!" he exclaimed tragically. "Ah, Mademoiselle, never in my life have I passed such a day!"

"Are you ill, Vicomte?" she asked.

"Ill! Were it not for you, I would be gone. You alone sustain me—it is for the pleasure of seeing you that I suffer. What kind of a menage is this, then, where I am walked around Institutions, where I am forced to listen to the exposition of doctrines, where the coffee is weak, where Sunday, which the bon Dieu set aside for a jour de fete resembles to a day in purgatory?"

"But, Vicomte," Honora laughed, "you must remember that you are in America, and that you have come here to study our manners and customs."

"Ah, no," he cried, "ah, no, it cannot all be like this! I will not believe it. Mr. Holt, who sought to entertain me before luncheon, offered to show me his collection of Chinese carvings! I, who might be at Trouville or Cabourg! If it were not for you, Mademoiselle, I should not stay here—not one little minute," he said, with a slow intensity. "Behold what I suffer for your sake!"

"For my sake?" echoed Honora.

"For what else?" demanded the Vicomte, gazing upon her with the eyes of martyrdom. "It is not for my health, alas! Between the coffee and this dimanche I have the vertigo."

Honora laughed again at the memory of the dizzy Sunday afternoons of her childhood, when she had been taken to see Mr. Isham's curios.

"You are cruel," said the Vicomte; "you laugh at my tortures."

"On the contrary, I think I understand them," she replied. "I have often felt the same way."

"My instinct was true, then," he cried triumphantly; "the first time my eyes fell on you, I said to myself, 'ah! there is one who understands.' And I am seldom mistaken."

"Your experience with the opposite sex," ventured Honora, "must have made you infallible."

He shrugged and smiled, as one whose modesty forbade the mention of conquests.

"You do not belong here either, Mademoiselle," he said. "You are not like these people. You have

temperament, and a future—believe me. Why do you waste your time?"

"What do you mean, Vicomte?"

"Ah, it is not necessary to explain what I mean. It is that you do not choose to understand—you are far too clever. Why is it, then, that you bore yourself by regarding Institutions and listening to sermons in your jeunesse? It is all very well for Mademoiselle Susan, but you are not created for a religieuse. And again, it pleases you to spend hours with the stockbroker, who is as lacking in esprit as the bull of Joshua. He is no companion for you."

"I am afraid," she said reprovingly, "that you do not understand Mr. Spence."

"Par exemple!" cried the Vicomte; "have I not seen hundreds' like him? Do not they come to Paris and live in the great hotels and demand cocktails and read the stock reports and send cablegrams all the day long? and go to the Folies Bergeres, and yawn? Nom de nom, of what does his conversation consist? Of the price of railroads;—is it not so? I, who speak to you, have talked to him. Does he know how to make love?"

"That accomplishment is not thought of very highly in America," Honora replied.

"It is because you are a new country," he declared.

"And you are mad over money. Money has taken the place of love."

"Is money so despised in France?" she asked. "I have heard—that you married for it!"

"Touch!" cried the Vicomte, laughing. "You see, I am frank with you. We marry for money, yes, but we do not make a god of it. It is our servant. You make it, and we enjoy it. Yes, and you, Mademoiselle—you, too, were made to enjoy. You do not belong here," he said, with a disdainful sweep of the arm. "Ah, I have solved you. You have in you the germ of the Riviera. You were born there."

Honora wondered if what he said were true. Was she different? She was having a great deal of pleasure at Silverdale; even the sermon reading, which would have bored her at home, had interested and amused her. But was it not from the novelty of these episodes, rather than from their special characters, that she received the stimulus? She glanced curiously towards the Vicomte, and met his eye.

They had been walking the while, and had crossed the lawn and entered one of the many paths which it had been Robert's pastime to cut through the woods. And at length they came out at a rustic summer-house set over the wooded valley. Honora, with one foot on the ground, sat on the railing gazing over the tree-tops; the Vicomte was on the bench beside her. His eyes sparkled and snapped, and suddenly she tingled with a sense that the situation was not without an element of danger.

"I had a feeling about you, last night at dinner," he said; "you reminded me of a line of Marcel Prevost, 'Cette femme ne sera pas aimee que parmi des drames.'"

"Nonsense," said Honora; "last night at dinner you were too much occupied with Miss Chamberlin to think of me."

"Ah, Mademoiselle, you have read me strangely if you think that. I talked to her with my lips, yes—but it was of you I was thinking. I was thinking that you were born to play a part in many dramas, that you have the fatal beauty which is rare in all ages." The Vicomte bent towards her, and his voice became caressing. "You cannot realize how beautiful you are," he sighed.

Suddenly he seized her hand, and before she could withdraw it she had the satisfaction of knowing the sensation of having it kissed. It was a strange sensation indeed. And the fact that she did not tingle with anger alone made her all the more angry. Trembling, her face burning, she leaped down from the railing and fled into the path. And there, seeing that he did not follow, she turned and faced him. He stood staring at her with eyes that had not ceased to sparkle.

"How cowardly of you!" she cried.

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he answered fervently, "I would risk your anger a thousand times to see you like that once more. I cannot help my feelings—they were dead indeed if they did not respond to such an inspiration. Let them plead for my pardon."

Honora felt herself melting a little. After all, there might have been some excuse for it, and he made love divinely. When he had caught up with her, his contriteness was such that she was willing to believe

he had not meant to insult her. And then, he was a Frenchman. As a proof of his versatility, if not of his good faith, he talked of neutral matters on the way back to the house, with the charming ease and lightness that was the gift of his race and class. On the borders of the wood they encountered the Robert Holts, walking with their children.

"Madame," said the Vicomte to Gwendolen, "your Silverdale is enchanting. We have been to that little summer-house which commands the valley."

"And are you still learning things about our country, Vicomte?" she asked, with a glance at Honora.

## CHAPTER X

### IN WHICH HONORA WIDENS HER HORIZON

If it were not a digression, it might be interesting to speculate upon the reason why, in view of their expressed opinions of Silverdale, both the Vicomte and Mr. Spence remained during the week that followed. Robert, who went off in the middle of it with his family to the seashore, described it to Honora as a normal week. During its progress there came and went a missionary from China, a pianist, an English lady who had heard of the Institution, a Southern spinster with literary gifts, a youthful architect who had not built anything, and a young lawyer interested in settlement work.

The missionary presented our heroine with a book he had written about the Yang-tse-kiang; the Southern lady suspected her of literary gifts; the architect walked with her through the woods to the rustic shelter where the Vicomte had kissed her hand, and told her that he now comprehended the feelings of Christopher Wren when he conceived St. Paul's Cathedral, of Michael Angelo when he painted the Sistine Chapel. Even the serious young lawyer succumbed, though not without a struggle. When he had first seen Miss Leffingwell, he confessed, he had thought her frivolous. He had done her an injustice, and wished to acknowledge it before he left. And, since she was interested in settlement work, he hoped, if she were going through New York, that she would let him know. It would be a real pleasure to show her what he was doing.

Best of all, Honora, by her unselfishness, endeared herself to her hostess.

"I can't tell you what a real help you are to me, my dear," said that lady. "You have a remarkable gift with people for so young a girl, and I do you the credit of thinking that it all springs from a kind heart."

In the meantime, unknown to Mrs. Holt, who might in all conscience have had a knowledge of what may be called social chemistry, a drama was slowly unfolding itself. By no fault of Honora's, of course. There may have been some truth in the quotation of the Vicomte as applied to her—that she was destined to be loved only amidst the play of drama. If experience is worth anything, Monsieur de Toqueville should have been an expert in matters of the sex. Could it be possible, Honora asked herself more than once, that his feelings were deeper than her feminine instinct and, the knowledge she had gleaned from novels led her to suspect?

It is painful to relate that the irregularity and deceit of the life the Vicomte was leading amused her, for existence at Silverdale was plainly not of a kind to make a gentleman of the Vicomte's temperament and habits ecstatically happy. And Honora was filled with a strange and unaccountable delight when she overheard him assuring Mrs. Wellfleet, the English lady of eleemosynary tendencies, that he was engaged in a study at first hand of Americans.

The time has come to acknowledge frankly that it was Honora he was studying—Honora as the type of young American womanhood. What he did not suspect was that young American womanhood was studying him. Thanks to a national System, she had had an apprenticeship; the heart-blood of Algernon Cartwright and many others had not been shed in vain. And the fact that she was playing with real fire, that this was a duel with the buttons off, lent a piquancy and zest to the pastime which it had hitherto lacked.

The Vicomte's feelings were by no means hidden processes to Honora, and it was as though she could lift the lid of the furnace at any time and behold the growth of the flame which she had lighted. Nay, nature had endowed her with such a gift that she could read the daily temperature as by a register hung on the outside, without getting scorched. Nor had there been any design on her part in thus tormenting his soul. He had not meant to remain more than four days at Silverdale, that she knew; he

had not meant to come to America and fall in love with a penniless beauty—that she knew also. The climax would be interesting, if perchance uncomfortable.

It is wonderful what we can find the time to do, if we only try. Monsieur de Toqueville lent Honora novels, which she read in bed; but being in the full bloom of health and of a strong constitution, this practice did not prevent her from rising at seven to take a walk through the garden with Mr. Holt—a custom which he had come insensibly to depend upon. And in the brief conversations which she vouchsafed the Vicomte, they discussed his novels. In vain he pleaded, in caressing undertones, that she should ride with him. Honora had never been on a horse, but she did not tell him so. If she would but drive, or walk-only a little way—he would promise faithfully not to forget himself. Honora intimated that the period of his probation had not yet expired. If he waylaid her on the stairs, he got but little satisfaction.

"You converse by the hour with the missionaries, and take long promenades with the architects and charity workers, but to me you will give nothing," he complained.

"The persons of whom you speak are not dangerous," answered Honora, giving him a look.

The look, and being called dangerous, sent up the temperature several degrees. Frenchmen are not the only branch of the male sex who are complimented by being called dangerous. The Vicomte was desolated, so he said.

"I stay here only for you, and the coffee is slowly deranging me," he declared in French, for most of their conversations were in that language. If there were duplicity in this, Honora did not recognize it. "I stay here only for you, and how you are cruel! I live for you—how, the good God only knows. I exist—to see you for ten minutes a day."

"Oh, Vicomte, you exaggerate. If you were to count it up, I am sure you would find that we talk an hour at least, altogether. And then, although I am very young and inexperienced, I can imagine how many conquests you have made by the same arts."

"I suffer," he cried; "ah, no, you cannot look at me without perceiving it—you who are so heartless. And when I see you play at golf with that Mr. Spence—!"

"Surely," said Honora, "you can't object to my acquiring a new accomplishment when I have the opportunity, and Mr. Spence is so kind and good-natured about it."

"Do you think I have no eyes?" he exclaimed. "Have I not seen him look at you like the great animal of Joshua when he wants his supper? He is without esprit, without soul. There is nothing inside of him but money-making machinery."

"The most valuable of all machinery," she replied, laughingly.

"If I thought you believed that, Mademoiselle, if I thought you were like so many of your countrywomen in this respect, I should leave to-morrow," he declared.

"Don't be too sure, Vicomte," she cautioned him.

If one possessed a sense of humour and a certain knowledge of mankind, the spectacle of a young and successful Wall Street broker at Silverdale that week was apt to be diverting. Mr. Spence held his own. He advised the architect to make a specialty of country houses, and promised some day to order one: he disputed boldly with the other young man as to the practical uses of settlement work, and even measured swords with the missionary. Needless to say, he was not popular with these gentlemen. But he was also good-natured and obliging, and he did not object to repeating for the English lady certain phrases which she called "picturesque expressions," and which she wrote down with a gold pencil.

It is evident, from the Vicomte's remarks, that he found time to continue Honora's lessons in golf—or rather that she found time, in the midst of her manifold and self-imposed duties, to take them. And in this diversion she was encouraged by Mrs. Holt herself. On Saturday morning, the heat being unusual, they ended their game by common consent at the fourth hole and descended a wood road to Silver Brook, to a spot which they had visited once before and had found attractive. Honora, after bathing her face in the pool, perched herself on a boulder. She was very fresh and radiant.

This fact, if she had not known it, she might have gathered from Mr. Silence's expression. He had laid down his coat; his sleeves were rolled up and his arms were tanned, and he stood smoking a cigarette and gazing at her with approbation. She lowered her eyes.

"Well, we've had a pretty good time, haven't we?" he remarked.

Lightning sometimes fails in its effect, but the look she flashed back at him from under her blue lashes seldom misses.

"I'm afraid I haven't been a very apt pupil," she replied modestly.

"You're on the highroad to a cup," he assured her. "If I could take you on for another week" He paused, and an expression came into his eyes which was not new to Honora, nor peculiar to Mr. Silence. "I have to go back to town on Monday."

If Honora felt any regret at this announcement, she did not express it.

"I thought you couldn't stand Silverdale much longer," she replied.

"You know why I stayed," he said, and paused again—rather awkwardly for Mr. Spence. But Honora was silent. "I had a letter this morning from my partner, Sidney Dallam, calling me back."

"I suppose you are very busy," said Honora, detaching a copper-green scale of moss from the boulder.

"The fact is," he explained, "that we have received an order of considerable importance, for which I am more or less responsible. Something of a compliment—since we are, after all, comparatively young men."

"Sometimes," said Honora, "sometimes I wish I were a man. Women are so hampered and circumscribed, and have to wait for things to happen to them. A man can do what he wants. He can go into Wall Street and fight until he controls miles of railroads and thousands and thousands of men. That would be a career!"

"Yes," he agreed, smilingly, "it's worth fighting for."

Her eyes were burning with a strange light as she looked down the vista of the wood road by which they had come. He flung his cigarette into the water and took a step nearer her.

"How long have I known you?" he asked.

She started.

"Why, it's only a little more than a week," she said.

"Does it seem longer than that to you?"

"Yes," admitted Honora, colouring; "I suppose it's because we've been staying in the same house."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Spence, "that I have known you always."

Honora sat very still. It passed through her brain, without comment, that there was a certain haunting familiarity about this remark; some other voice, in some other place, had spoken it, and in very much the same tone.

"You're the kind of girl I admire," he declared. "I've been watching you—more than you have any idea of. You're adaptable. Put you down any place, and you take hold. For instance, it's a marvellous thing to me how you've handled all the curiosities up there this week."

"Oh, I like people," said Honora, "they interest me." And she laughed a little, nervously. She was aware that Mr. Spence was making love, in his own manner: the New fork manner, undoubtedly; though what he said was changed by the new vibrations in his voice. He was making love, too, with a characteristic lack of apology and with assurance. She stole a glance at him, and beheld the image of a dominating man of affairs. He did not, it is true, evoke in her that extreme sensation which has been called a thrill. She had read somewhere that women were always expecting thrills, and never got them. Nevertheless, she had not realized how close a bond of sympathy had grown between them until this sudden announcement of his going back to New York. In a little while she too would be leaving for St. Louis. The probability that she would never see him again seemed graver than she would have believed.

"Will you miss me a little?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," she said breathlessly, "and I shall be curious to know how your—your enterprise succeeds."

"Honora," he said, "it is only a week since I first met you, but I know my own mind. You are the woman I want, and I think I may say without boasting that I can give you what you desire in life—after a while. I love you. You are young, and just now I felt that perhaps I should have waited a year before speaking, but I was afraid of missing altogether what I know to be the great happiness of my life. Will

you marry me?"

She sat silent upon the rock. She heard him speak, it is true; but, try as she would, the full significance of his words would not come to her. She had, indeed, no idea that he would propose, no notion that his heart was involved to such an extent. He was very near her, but he had not attempted to touch her. His voice, towards the end of his speech, had trembled with passion—a true note had been struck. And she had struck it, by no seeming effort! He wished to marry her!

He aroused her again.

"I have frightened you," he said.

She opened her eyes. What he beheld in them was not fright—it was nothing he had ever seen before. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he was awed. And, seeing him helpless, she put out her hands to him with a gesture that seemed to enhance her gift a thousand-fold. He had not realized what he was getting.

"I am not frightened," she said. "Yes, I will marry you."

He was not sure whether—so brief was the moment!—he had held and kissed her cheek. His arms were empty now, and he caught a glimpse of her poised on the road above him amidst the quivering, sunlit leaves, looking back at him over her shoulder.

He followed her, but she kept nimbly ahead of him until they came out into the open golf course. He tried to think, but failed. Never in his orderly life had anything so precipitate happened to him. He caught up with her, devoured her with his eyes, and beheld in marriage a delirium.

"Honora," he said thickly, "I can't grasp it."

She gave him a quick look, and a smile quivered at the corners of her mouth.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked.

"I am thinking of Mrs. Holt's expression when we tell her," said Honora. "But we shan't tell her yet, shall we, Howard? We'll have it for our own secret a little while."

The golf course being deserted, he pressed her arm.

"We'll tell her whenever you like, dear," he replied.

In spite of the fact that they drove Joshua's trotter to lunch—much too rapidly in the heat of the day, they were late.

"I shall never be able to go in there and not give it away," he whispered to her on the stairs.

"You look like the Cheshire cat in the tree," whispered Honora, laughing, "only more purple, and not so ghostlike."

"I know I'm smiling," replied Howard, "I feel like it, but I can't help it. It won't come off. I want to blurt out the news to every one in the dining-room—to that little Frenchman, in particular."

Honora laughed again. Her imagination easily summoned up the tableau which such a proceeding would bring forth. The incredulity, the chagrin, the indignation, even, in some quarters. He conceived the household, with the exception of the Vicomte, precipitating themselves into his arms.

Honora, who was cool enough herself (no doubt owing to the superior training which women receive in matters of deportment), observed that his entrance was not a triumph of dissimulation. His colour was high, and his expression, indeed, a little idiotic; and he declared afterwards that he felt like a sandwich-man, with the news printed in red letters before and behind. Honora knew that the intense improbability of the truth would save them, and it did. Mrs. Holt remarked, slyly, that the game of golf must have hidden attractions, and regretted that she was too old to learn it.

"We went very slowly on account of the heat," Howard declared.

"I should say that you had gone very rapidly, from your face," retorted Mrs. Holt. In relaxing moods she indulged in banter.

Honora stepped into the breach. She would not trust her newly acquired fiance to extricate himself.

"We were both very much worried, Mrs. Holt," she explained, "because we were late for lunch once before."



"I suppose I'll have to forgive you, my dear, especially with that colour. I am modern enough to approve of exercise for young girls, and I am sure your Aunt Mary will think Silverdale has done you good when I send you back to her."

"Oh, I'm sure she will," said Honora.

In the meantime Mr. Spence was concentrating all of his attention upon a jellied egg. Honora glanced at the Vicomte. He sat very stiff, and his manner of twisting his mustache reminded her of an animal sharpening its claws. It was at this moment that the butler handed her a telegram, which, with Mrs. Holt's permission, she opened and read twice before the meaning of it came to her.

"I hope it is no bad news, Honora," said Mrs. Holt.

"It's from Peter Erwin," she replied, still a little dazed. "He's in New York. And he's coming up on the five o'clock train to spend an hour with me."

"Oh," said Susan; "I remember his picture on your bureau at Sutcliffe. He had such a good face. And you told me about him."

"He is like my brother," Honora explained, aware that Howard was looking at her. "Only he is much older than I. He used to wheel me up and down when I was a baby. He was, an errand boy in the bank then, and Uncle Tom took an interest in him, and now he is a lawyer. A very good one, I believe."

"I have a great respect for any man who makes his own way in life," said Mrs. Holt. "And since he is such an old friend, my dear, you must ask him to spend the night."

"Oh, thank you, Mrs. Bolt," Honora answered.

It was, however, with mingled feelings that she thought of Peter's arrival at this time. Life, indeed, was full of strange coincidences!

There was a little door that led out of the house by the billiard room, Honora remembered, and contrived, after luncheon, to slip away and reach it. She felt that she must be alone, and if she went to her room she was likely to be disturbed by Susan or Mrs. Joshua—or indeed Mrs. Holt herself. Honora meant to tell Susan the first of all. She crossed the great lawn quickly, keeping as much as possible the trees and masses of shrubbery between herself and the house, and reached the forest. With a really large fund of energy at her disposal, Honora had never been one to believe in the useless expenditure of it; nor did she feel the intense desire which a girl of another temperament might have had, under the same conditions, to keep in motion. So she sat down on a bench within the borders of the wood.

It was not that she wished to reflect, in the ordinary meaning of the word, that she had sought seclusion, but rather to give her imagination free play. The enormity of the change that was to come into her life did not appall her in the least; but she had, in connection with it, a sense of unreality which, though not unpleasant, she sought unconsciously to dissipate. Howard Spence, she reflected with a smile, was surely solid and substantial enough, and she thought of him the more tenderly for the possession of these attributes. A castle founded on such a rock was not a castle in Spain!

It did not occur to Honora that her thoughts might be more of the castle than of the rock: of the heaven he was to hold on his shoulders than of the Hercules she had chosen to hold it.

She would write to her Aunt Mary and her Uncle Tom that very afternoon—one letter to both. Tears came into her eyes when she thought of them, and of their lonely life without her. But they would come on to New York to visit her often, and they would be proud of her. Of one thing she was sure—she must go home to them at once—on Tuesday. She would tell Mrs. Holt to-morrow, and Susan to-night. And, while pondering over the probable expression of that lady's amazement, it suddenly occurred to her that she must write the letter immediately, because Peter Erwin was coming.

What would he say? Should she tell him? She was surprised to find that the idea of doing so was painful to her. But she was aroused from these reflections by a step on the path, and raised her head to perceive the Vicomte. His face wore an expression of triumph.

"At last," he cried, "at last!" And he sat down on the bench beside her. Her first impulse was to rise, yet for some inexplicable reason she remained.

"I always suspected in you the qualities of a Monsieur Lecoq," she remarked. "You have an instinct for the chase."

"Mon dieu?" he said. "I have risked a stroke of the sun to find you. Why should you so continually run away from me?"

"To test your ingenuity, Vicomte."

"And that other one—the stock-broker—you do not avoid him. Diable, I am not blind, Mademoiselle. It is plain to me at luncheon that you have made boil the sluggish blood of that one. As for me—"

"Your boiling-point is lower," she said, smiling.

"Listen, Mademoiselle," he pursued, bending towards her. "It is not for my health that I stay here, as I have told you. It is for the sight of you, for the sound of the music of that low voice. It is in the hope that you will be a little kinder, that you will understand me a little better. And to-day, when I learn that still another is on his way to see you, I could sit still no longer. I do not fear that Spence,—no. But this other—what is he like?"

"He is the best type of American," replied Honora. "I am sure you will be interested in him, and like him."

The Vicomte shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not in America that you will find your destiny, Mademoiselle. You are made to grace a salon, a court, which you will not find in this country. Such a woman as you is thrown away here. You possess qualities—you will pardon me—in which your countrywomen are lacking, —esprit, imagination, elan, the power to bind people to you. I have read you as you have not read yourself. I have seen how you have served yourself by this famille Holt, and how at the same time you have kept their friendship."

"Vicomte!" she exclaimed.

"Ah, do not get angry," he begged; "such gifts are rare—they are sublime. They lead," he added, raising his arms, "to the heights."

Honora was silent. She was, indeed, not unmoved by his voice, into which there was creeping a vibrant note of passion. She was a little frightened, but likewise puzzled and interested. This was all so different from what she had expected of him. What did he mean? Was she indeed like that?

She was aware that he was speaking again, that he was telling her of a chateau in France which his ancestors had owned since the days of Louis XII; a grey pile that stood upon a thickly wooded height,—a chateau with a banquet hall, where kings had dined, with a chapel where kings had prayed, with a flowering terrace high above a gleaming river. It was there that his childhood had been passed. And as he spoke, she listened with mingled feelings, picturing the pageantry of life in such a place.

"I tell you this, Mademoiselle," he said, "that you may know I am not what you call an adventurer. Many of these, alas! come to your country. And I ask you to regard with some leniency customs which must be strange to Americans. When we marry in France, it is with a dot, and especially is it necessary amongst the families of our nobility."

Honora rose, the blood mounting to her temples.

"Mademoiselle," he cried, "do not misunderstand me. I would die rather than hurt your feelings. Listen, I pray. It was to tell you frankly that I came to this country for that purpose,—in order that I might live as my ancestors have lived, with a hotel in Paris: But the chateau, grace a dieu, is not mortgaged, nor am I wholly impoverished. I have soixante quinze mille livres de rente, which is fifteen thousand dollars a year in your money, and which goes much farther in France. At the proper time, I will present these matters to your guardians. I have lived, but I have a heart, and I love you madly. Rather would I dwell with you in Provence, where I will cultivate the soil of my forefathers, than a palace on the Champs Elysees with another. We can come to Paris for two months, at least. For you I can throw my prospects out of the window with a light heart. Honore—how sweet is your name in my language—I love you to despair."

He seized her hand and pressed it to his lips, but she drew it gently away. It seemed to her that he had made the very air quiver with feeling, and she let herself wonder, for a moment, what life with him would be. Incredible as it seemed, he had proposed to her, a penniless girl! Her own voice was not quite steady as she answered him, and her eyes were filled with compassion.

"Vicomte," she said, "I did not know that you cared for me—that way. I thought—I thought you were amusing yourself."

"Amusing myself!" he exclaimed bitterly. "And you—were you amusing yourself?"

"I—I tried to avoid you," she replied, in a low voice.

"I am engaged."

"Engaged!" He sprang to his feet. "Engaged! Ah, no, I will not believe it. You were engaged when you came here?"

She was no little alarmed by the violence which he threw into his words. At the same time, she was indignant. And yet a mischievous sprite within her led her on to tell him the truth.

"No, I am going to marry Mr. Howard Spence, although I do not wish it announced."

For a moment he stood motionless, speechless, staring at her, and then he seemed to sway a little and to choke.

"No, no," he cried, "it cannot be! My ears have deceived me. I am not sane. You are going to marry him—? Ah, you have sold yourself."

"Monsieur de Toqueville," she said, "you forget yourself. Mr. Spence is an honourable man, and I love him."

The Vicomte appeared to choke again. And then, suddenly, he became himself, although his voice was by no means natural. His elaborate and ironic bow she remembered for many years.

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," he said, "and adieu. You will be good enough to convey my congratulations to Mr. Spence."

With a kind of military "about face" he turned and left her abruptly, and she watched him as he hurried across the lawn until he had disappeared behind the trees near the house. When she sat down on the bench again, she found that she was trembling a little. Was the unexpected to occur to her from now on? Was it true, as the Vicomte had said, that she was destined to be loved amidst the play of drama?

She felt sorry for him because he had loved her enough to fling to the winds his chances of wealth for her sake—a sufficient measure of the feelings of one of his nationality and caste. And she permitted, for an instant, her mind to linger on the supposition that Howard Spence had never come into her life; might she not, when the Vicomte had made his unexpected and generous avowal, have accepted him? She thought of the romances of her childish days, written at fever heat, in which ladies with titles moved around and gave commands and rebuked lovers who slipped in through wicket gates. And to think that she might have been a Vicomtesse and have lived in a castle!

A poor Vicomtesse, it is true.

## CHAPTER XI

### WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

Honora sat still upon the bench. After an indefinite period she saw through the trees a vehicle on the driveway, and in it a single passenger. And suddenly it occurred to her that the passenger must be Peter, for Mrs. Holt had announced her intention of sending for him. She arose and approached the house, not without a sense of agitation.

She halted a moment at a little distance from the porch, where he was talking with Howard Spence and Joshua, and the fact that he was an unchanged Peter came to her with a shock of surprise. So much, in less than a year, had happened to Honora! And the sight of him, and the sound of his voice, brought back with a rush memories of a forgotten past. How long it seemed since she had lived in St. Louis!

Yes, he was the same Peter, but her absence from him had served to sharpen her sense of certain characteristics. He was lounging in his chair with his long legs crossed, with one hand in his pocket, and talking to these men as though he had known them always. There was a quality about him which had never struck her before, and which eluded exact definition. It had never occurred to her, until now, when she saw him out of the element with which she had always associated him, that Peter Erwin had a personality. That personality was a mixture of simplicity and self-respect and—common sense. And as Honora listened to his cheerful voice, she perceived that he had the gift of expressing himself clearly

and forcibly and withal modestly; nor did it escape her that the other two men were listening with a certain deference. In her sensitive state she tried to evade the contrast thus suddenly presented to her between Peter and the man she had promised, that very morning, to marry.

Howard Spence was seated on the table, smoking a cigarette. Never, it seemed, had he more distinctly typified to her Prosperity. An attribute which she had admired in him, of strife without the appearance of strife, lost something of its value. To look at Peter was to wonder whether there could be such a thing as a well-groomed combatant; and until to-day she had never thought of Peter as a combatant. The sight of his lean face summoned, all undesired, the vague vision of an ideal, and perhaps it was this that caused her voice to falter a little as she came forward and called his name. He rose precipitately.

"What a surprise, Peter!" she said, as she took his hand. "How do you happen to be in the East?"

"An errand boy," he replied. "Somebody had to come, so they chose me. Incidentally," he added, smiling down at her, "it is a part of my education."

"We thought you were lost," said Howard Spence, significantly.

"Oh, no," she answered lightly, evading his look. "I was on the bench at the edge of the wood." She turned again to Peter. "How good of you to come up and see me!"

"I couldn't have resisted that," he declared, "if it were only for an hour."

"I've been trying to persuade him to stay a while with us," Joshua put in with unusual graciousness. "My mother will be disappointed not to see you."

"There is nothing I should like better, Mr. Holt," said Peter, simply, gazing off across the lawn. "Unfortunately I have to leave for the West to-night."

"Before you go," said Honora, "you must see this wonderful place. Come, we'll begin with the garden."

She had a desire now to take him away by himself, something she had wished, an hour ago, to avoid.

"Wouldn't you like a runabout?" suggested Joshua, hospitably.

Honora thanked him.

"I'm sure Mr. Erwin would rather walk," she replied.

"Come, Peter, you must tell me all the news of home."

Spence accepted his dismissal with a fairly good grace, and gave no evidence of jealousy. He put his hand on Peter's shoulder.

"If you're ever in New York, Erwin," said he, "look me up Dallam and Spence. We're members of the Exchange, so you won't have any trouble in finding us. I'd like to talk to you sometime about the West."

Peter thanked him.

For a little while, as they went down the driveway side by side, he was meditatively silent. She wondered what he thought of Howard Spence, until suddenly she remembered that her secret was still her own, that Peter had as yet no particular reason to single out Mr. Spence for especial consideration. She could not, however, resist saying, "New Yorkers are like that."

"Like what?" he asked.

She coloured.

"Like—Mr. Spence. A little—self-assertive, sure of themselves." She strove to keep out of her voice any suspicion of the agitation which was the result of the events of an extraordinary day, not yet ended. She knew that it would have been wiser not to have mentioned Howard; but Peter's silence, somehow, had impelled her to speak. "He has made quite an unusual success for so young a man."

Peter looked at her and shook his head.

"New York—success! What is to become of poor old St. Louis?" he inquired.

"Oh, I'm going back next week," Honora cried. "I wish I were going with you."

"And leave all this," he said incredulously, "for trolley rides and Forest Park and—and me?"

He stopped in the garden path and looked upon the picture she made standing in the sunlight against the blazing borders, her wide hat casting a shadow on her face. And the smile which she had known so well since childhood, indulgent, quizzical, with a touch of sadness, was in his eyes. She was conscious of a slight resentment. Was there, in fact, no change in her as the result of the events of those momentous ten months since she had seen him? And rather than a tolerance in which there was neither antagonism nor envy, she would have preferred from Peter an open disapproval of luxury, of the standards which he implied were hers. She felt that she had stepped into another world, but he refused to be dazzled by it. He insisted upon treating her as the same Honora.

"How did you leave Uncle Tom and Aunt Mary?" she asked.

They were counting the days, he said, until she should return, but they did not wish to curtail her visit. They did not expect her next week, he knew.

Honora coloured again.

"I feel—that I ought to go to them," she said.

He glanced at her as though her determination to leave Silverdale so soon surprised him.

"They will be very happy to see you, Honora," he said. "They have been very lonesome."

She softened. Some unaccountable impulse prompted her to ask: "And you? Have you missed me—a little?"

He did not answer, and she saw that he was profoundly affected. She laid a hand upon his arm.

"Oh, Peter, I didn't mean that," she cried. "I know you have. And I have missed you—terribly. It seems so strange seeing you here," she went on hurriedly. "There are so many' things I want to show you. Tell me how it happened that you came on to New York."

"Somebody in the firm had to come," he said.

"In the firm!" she repeated. She did not grasp the full meaning of this change in his status, but she remembered that Uncle Tom had predicted it one day, and that it was an honour. "I never knew any one so secretive about their own affairs! Why didn't you write me you had been admitted to the firm? So you are a partner of Judge Brice."

"Brice, Graves, and Erwin," said Peter; "it sounds very grand, doesn't it? I can't get used to it myself."

"And what made you call yourself an errand boy?" she exclaimed reproachfully. "When I go back to the house I intend to tell Joshua Holt and—and Mr. Spence that you are a great lawyer."

Peter laughed.

"You'd better wait a few years before you say that," said he.

He took an interest in everything he saw, in Mr. Holt's flowers, in Joshua's cow barn, which they traversed, and declared, if he were ever rich enough, he would live in the country. They walked around the pond, —fringed now with yellow water-lilies on their floating green pads, —through the woods, and when the shadows were lengthening came out at the little summer-house over the valley of Silver Brook —the scene of that first memorable encounter with the Vicomte. At the sight of it the episode, and much else of recent happening, rushed back into Honora's mind, and she realized with suddenness that she had, in his companionship, unconsciously been led far afield and in pleasant places. Comparisons seemed inevitable.

She watched him with an unwonted tugging at her heart as he stood for a long time by the edge of the railing, gazing over the tree-tops of the valley towards the distant hazy hills. Nor did she understand what it was in him that now, on this day of days when she had definitely cast the die of life, when she had chosen her path, aroused this strange emotion. Why had she never felt it before? She had thought his face homely—now it seemed to shine with a transfiguring light. She recalled, with a pang, that she had criticised his clothes: to-day they seemed the expression of the man himself. Incredible is the range of human emotion! She felt a longing to throw herself into his arms, and to weep there.

He turned at length from the view.

"How wonderful!" he said.

"I didn't know—you cared for nature so much, Peter."

He looked at her strangely and put out his hand and drew her, unresisting, to the bench beside him.

"Are you in trouble, Honora?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she cried, "oh, no, I am—very happy."

"You may have thought it odd that I should have come here without knowing Mrs. Holt," he said gravely, "particularly when you were going home so soon. I do not know myself why I came. I am a matter-of-fact person, but I acted on an impulse."

"An impulse!" she faltered, avoiding the troubled, searching look in his eyes.

"Yes," he said, "an impulse. I can call it by no other name. I should have taken a train that leaves New York at noon; but I had a feeling this morning, which seemed almost like a presentiment, that I might be of some use to you."

"This morning?" She felt herself trembling, and she scarcely recognized Peter with such words on his lips. "I am happy—indeed I am. Only—I am overwrought—seeing you again—and you made me think of home."

"It was no doubt very foolish of me," he declared. "And if my coming has upset you—"

"Oh, no," she cried. "Please don't think so. It has given me a sense of—of security. That you were ready to help me if—if I needed you."

"You should always have known that," he replied. He rose and stood gazing off down the valley once more, and she watched him with her heart beating, with a sense of an impending crisis which she seemed powerless to stave off. And presently he turned to her, "Honora, I have loved you for many years," he said. "You were too young for me to speak of it. I did not intend to speak of it when I came here to-day. For many years I have hoped that some day you might be my wife. My one fear has been that I might lose you. Perhaps—perhaps it has been a dream. But I am willing to wait, should you wish to see more of the world. You are young yet, and I am offering myself for all time. There is no other woman for me, and never can be."

He paused and smiled down at her. But she did not speak. She could not.

"I know," he went on, "that you are ambitious. And with your gifts I do not blame you. I cannot offer you great wealth, but I say with confidence that I can offer you something better, something surer. I can take care of you and protect you, and I will devote my life to your happiness. Will you marry me?"

Her eyes were sparkling with tears,—tears, he remembered afterwards, that were like blue diamonds.

"Oh, Peter," she cried, "I wish I could! I have always—wished that I could. I can't."

"You can't?"

She shook her head.

"I—I have told no one yet—not even Aunt Mary. I am going to marry Mr. Spence."

For a long time he was silent, and she did not dare to look at the suffering in his face.

"Honora," he said at last, "my most earnest wish in life will be for your happiness. And whatever may come to you I hope that you will remember that I am your friend, to be counted on. And that I shall not change. Will you remember that?"

"Yes," she whispered. She looked at him now, and through the veil of her tears she seemed to see his soul shining in his eyes. The tones of a distant church bell were borne to them on the valley breeze.

Peter glanced at his watch.

"I am afraid," he said, "that I haven't time to go back to the house—my train goes at seven. Can I get down to the village through the valley?"

Honora pointed out the road, faintly perceptible through the trees beneath them.

"And you will apologize for my departure to Mrs. Holt?"

She nodded. He took her hand, pressed it, and was gone. And presently, in a little clearing far below, he turned and waved his hat at her bravely.

## CHAPTER XII

### WHICH CONTAINS A SURPRISE FOR MRS. HOLT

How long she sat gazing with unseeing eyes down the valley Honora did not know. Distant mutterings of thunder aroused her; the evening sky had darkened, and angry-looking clouds of purple were gathering over the hills. She rose and hurried homeward. She had thought to enter by the billiard-room door, and so gain her own chamber without encountering the household; but she had reckoned without her hostess. Beyond the billiard room, in the little entry filled with potted plants, she came face to face with that lady, who was inciting a footman to further efforts in his attempt to close a recalcitrant skylight. Honora proved of more interest, and Mrs. Holt abandoned the skylight.

"Why, my dear," she said, "where have you been all afternoon?"

"I—I have been walking with Mr. Erwin, Mrs. Holt. I have been showing him Silverdale."

"And where is he? It seems to me I invited him to stay all night, and Joshua tells me he extended the invitation."

"We were in the little summer-house, and suddenly he discovered that it was late and he had to catch the seven o'clock train," faltered Honora, somewhat disconnectedly. "Otherwise he would have come to you himself and told you—how much he regretted not staying. He has to go to St. Louis to-night."

"Well," said Mrs. Holt, "this is an afternoon of surprises. The Vicomte has gone off, too, without even waiting to say good-by."

"The Vicomte!" exclaimed Honora.

"Didn't you see him, either, before he left?" inquired Mrs. Holt; "I thought perhaps you might be able to give me some further explanation of it."

"I?" exclaimed Honora. She felt ready to sink through the floor, and Mrs. Holt's delft-blue eyes haunted her afterwards like a nightmare.

"Didn't you see him, my dear? Didn't he tell you anything?"

"He—he didn't say he was going away."

"Did he seem disturbed about anything?" Mrs. Holt insisted.

"Now I think of it, he did seem a little disturbed."

"To save my life," said Mrs. Holt, "I can't understand it. He left a note for me saying that he had received a telegram, and that he had to go at once. I was at a meeting of my charity board. It seems a very strange proceeding for such an agreeable and polite man as the Vicomte, although he had his drawbacks, as all Continentals have. And at times I thought he was grave and moody,—didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, he was moody," Honora agreed eagerly.

"You noticed it, too," said Mrs. Holt. "But he was a charming man, and so interested in America and in the work we are doing. But I can't understand about the telegram. I had Carroll inquire of every servant in the house, and there is no knowledge of a telegram having come up from the village this afternoon."

"Perhaps the Vicomte might have met the messenger in the grounds," hazarded Honora.

At this point their attention was distracted by a noise that bore a striking resemblance to a suppressed laugh. The footman on the step-ladder began to rattle the skylight vigorously.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Woods?" said Mrs. Holt.

"It must have been some dust off the skylight, Madam, that got into my throat," he stammered, the colour of a geranium.

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Holt, "there is no dust on the skylight."

"It may be I swallowed the wrong way, looking up like, as I was, Madam," he ventured, rubbing the frame and looking at his finger to prove his former theory.

"You are very stupid not to be able to close it," she declared; "in a few minutes the place will be flooded. Tell Carroll to come and do it."

Honora suffered herself to be led limply through the library and up the stairs into Mrs. Holt's own boudoir, where a maid was closing the windows against the first great drops of the storm, which the wind was pelting against them. She drew the shades deftly, lighted the gas, and retired. Honora sank down in one of the upholstered light blue satin chairs and gazed at the shining brass of the coal grate set in the marble mantel, above which hung an engraving of Sir Joshua Reynolds' cherubs. She had an instinct that the climax of the drama was at hand.

Mrs. Holt sat down in the chair opposite.

"My dear," she began, "I told you the other day what an unexpected and welcome comfort and help you have been to me. You evidently inherit" (Mrs. Holt coughed slightly) "the art of entertaining and pleasing, and I need not warn you, my dear, against the dangers of such a gift. Your aunt has evidently brought you up with strictness and religious care. You have been very fortunate."

"Indeed I have, Mrs. Holt," echoed Honora, in bewilderment.

"And Susan," continued Mrs. Holt, "useful and willing as she is, does not possess your gift of taking people off my hands and entertaining them."

Honora could think of no reply to this. Her eyes—to which no one could be indifferent—were riveted on the face of her hostess, and how was the good lady to guess that her brain was reeling?

I was about to say, my dear, that I expect to have a great deal of—well, of rather difficult company this summer. Next week, for instance, some prominent women in the Working Girls' Relief Society are coming, and on July the twenty-third I give a garden party for the delegates to the Charity Conference in New York. The Japanese Minister has promised to pay me a visit, and Sir Rupert Grant, who built those remarkable tuberculosis homes in England, you know, is arriving in August with his family. Then there are some foreign artists."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," exclaimed Honora; "how many interesting people you see!"

"Exactly, my dear. And I thought that, in addition to the fact that I have grown very fond of you, you would be very useful to me here, and that a summer with me might not be without its advantages. As your aunt will have you until you are married, which, I may say, without denying your attractions, is likely to be for some time, I intend to write to her to-night—with your consent—and ask her to allow you to remain with me all summer."

Honora sat transfixed, staring painfully at the big pendant ear-rings.

"It is so kind of you, Mrs. Holt—" she faltered.

"I can realize, my dear, that you would wish to get back to your aunt. The feeling does you infinite credit. But, on the other hand, besides the advantages which would accrue to you, it might, to put the matter delicately, be of a little benefit to your relations, who will have to think of your future."

"Indeed, it is good of you, but I must go back, Mrs. Holt."

"Of course," said Mrs. Holt, with a touch of dignity—for ere now people had left Silverdale before she wished them to—"of course, if you do not care to stay, that is quite another thing."

"Oh, Mrs. Holt, don't say that!" cried Honora, her face burning; "I cannot thank you enough for the pleasure you have given me. If—if things were different, I would stay with you gladly, although I should miss my family. But now,—now I feel that I must be with them. I—I am engaged to be married."

Honora still remembers the blank expression which appeared on the countenance of her hostess when she spoke these words. Mrs. Holt's cheeks twitched, her ear-rings quivered, and her bosom heaved-once.

"Engaged to be married!" she gasped.



"Yes," replied our heroine, humbly, "I was going to tell you—to-morrow."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Holt, after a silence, "it is to the young man who was here this afternoon, and whom I did not see. It accounts for his precipitate departure. But I must say, Honora, since frankness is one of my faults, that I feel it my duty to write to your aunt and disclaim all responsibility."

"It is not to Mr. Erwin," said Honora, meekly; "it is—it is to Mr. Spence."

Mrs. Holt seemed to find difficulty in speaking. Her former symptoms, which Honora had come to recognize as indicative of agitation, returned with alarming intensity. And when at length her voice made itself heard, it was scarcely recognizable.

"You are engaged—to—Howard Spence?"

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," exclaimed Honora, "it was as great a surprise to me—believe me—as it is to you."

But even the knowledge that they shared a common amazement did not appear, at once, to assuage Mrs. Holt's emotions.

"Do you love him?" she demanded abruptly.

Whereupon Honora burst into tears.

"Oh, Mrs. Holt," she sobbed, "how can you ask?"

From this time on the course of events was not precisely logical. Mrs. Holt, setting in abeyance any ideas she may have had about the affair, took Honora in her arms, and against that ample bosom was sobbed out the pent-up excitement and emotion of an extraordinary day.

"There, there, my dear," said Mrs. Holt, stroking the dark hair, "I should not have asked you that—forgive me." And the worthy lady, quivering with sympathy now, remembered the time of her own engagement to Joshua. And the fact that the circumstances of that event differed somewhat from those of the present—in regularity, at least, increased rather than detracted from Mrs. Holt's sudden access of tenderness. The perplexing questions as to the probable result of such a marriage were swept away by a flood of feeling. "There, there, my dear, I did not mean to be harsh. What you told me was such a shock—such a surprise, and marriage is such a grave and sacred thing."

"I know it," sobbed Honora.

"And you are very young."

"Yes, Mrs. Holt."

"And it happened in my house."

"No," said Honora, "it happened—near the golf course."

Mrs. Holt smiled, and wiped her eyes.

"I mean, my dear, that I shall always feel responsible for bringing you together—for your future happiness. That is a great deal. I could have wished that you both had taken longer to reflect, but I hope with all my heart that you will be happy."

Honora lifted up a tear-stained face.

"He said it was because I was going away that—that he spoke," she said.  
"Oh, Mrs. Holt, I knew that you would be kind about it."

"Of course I am kind about it, my dear," said Mrs. Holt. "As I told you, I have grown to have an affection for you. I feel a little as though you belonged to me. And after this—this event, I expect to see a great deal of you. Howard Spence's mother was a very dear friend of mine. I was one of the first who knew her when she came to New York, from Troy, a widow, to educate her son. She was a very fine and a very courageous woman." Mrs. Holt paused a moment. "She hoped that Howard would be a lawyer."

"A lawyer!" Honora repeated.

"I lost sight of him for several years," continued Mrs. Holt, "but before I invited him here I made some inquiries about him from friends of mine in the financial world. I find that he is successful for so young a man, and well thought of. I have no doubt he will make a good husband, my dear, although I could wish he were not on the Stock Exchange. And I hope you will make him happy."

Whereupon the good lady kissed Honora, and dismissed her to dress for dinner.

"I shall write to your aunt at once," she said.

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Requited love, unsettled condition that it is supposed to bring, did not interfere with Howard Spence's appetite at dinner. His spirits, as usual, were of the best, and from time to time Honora was aware of his glance. Then she lowered her eyes. She sat as in a dream; and, try as she might, her thoughts would not range themselves. She seemed to see him but dimly, to hear what he said faintly; and it conveyed nothing to her mind.

This man was to be her husband! Over and over she repeated it to herself. His name was Howard Spence, and he was on the highroad to riches and success, and she was to live in New York. Ten days before he had not existed for her. She could not bring herself to believe that he existed now. Did she love him? How could she love him, when she did not realize him? One thing she knew, that she had loved him that morning.

The fetters of her past life were broken, and this she would not realize. She had opened the door of the cage for what? These were the fragments of thoughts that drifted through her mind like tattered clouds across an empty sky after a storm. Peter Erwin appeared to her more than once, and he was strangely real. But he belonged to the past. Course succeeded course, and she talked subconsciously to Mr. Holt and Joshua—such is the result of feminine training.

After dinner she stood on the porch. The rain had ceased, a cool damp breeze shook the drops from the leaves, and the stars were shining. Presently, at the sound of a step behind her, she started. He was standing at her shoulder.

"Honora!" he said.

She did not move.

"Honora, I haven't seen you—alone—since morning. It seems like a thousand years. Honora?"

"Yes."

"Did you mean it?"

"Did I mean what?"

"When you said you'd marry me." His voice trembled a little. "I've been thinking of nothing but you all day. You're not—sorry? You haven't changed your mind?"

She shook her head.

"At dinner when you wouldn't look at me, and this afternoon—"

"No, I'm not sorry," she said, cutting him short. "I'm not sorry."

He put his arm about her with an air that was almost apologetic. And, seeing that she did not resist, he drew her to him and kissed her. Suddenly, unaccountably to her, she clung to him.

"You love me!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she whispered, "but I am tired. I—I am going upstairs, Howard. I am tired."

He kissed her again.

"I can't believe it!" he said. "I'll make you a queen. And we'll be married in the autumn, Honora." He nodded boyishly towards the open windows of the library. "Shall I tell them?" he asked. "I feel like shouting it. I can't hold on much longer. I wonder what the old lady will say!"

Honora disengaged herself from his arms and fled to the screen door. As she opened it, she turned and smiled back at him.

"Mrs. Holt knows already," she said.

And catching her skirt, she flew quickly up the stairs.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MODERN CHRONICLE — VOLUME 02 \*\*\*

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