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#114 in our series by Gilbert Parker

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YOU NEVER KNOW YOUR LUCK

[BEING THE STORY OF A MATRIMONIAL DESERTER]

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 3.

XII. AT THE RECEIPT OF CUSTOM

XIII. KITTY SPEAKS HER MIND AGAIN

XIV. AWAITING THE VERDICT

XV. "MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM"

XVI. "'TWAS FOR YOUR PLEASURE YOU CAME HERE, YOU GO BACK FOR MINE"

XVII. WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT?

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER XII

AT THE RECEIPT OF CUSTOM

"What are you laughing at, Kitty? You cackle like a young hen with her first egg." So spoke Mrs. Tynan to her daughter, who alternately swung backwards and forwards in a big rocking-chair, silently gazing into the distant sky, or sat still and "cackled" as her mother had said.

A person of real observation and astuteness, however, would have noticed that Kitty's laughter told a story which was not joy and gladness--neither good humour nor the abandonment of a luxurious nature. It was tinged with bitterness and had the smart of the nettle.

Her mother's question only made her laugh the more, and at last Mrs. Tynan stooped over her and said, "I could shake you, Kitty. You'd make a snail fidget, and I've got enough to do to keep my senses steady with all the house-work--and now her in there!" She tossed a hand behind her fretfully.

Quick with love for her mother, as she always was, Kitty caught the other's trembling hand. "You've always had too much to do, mother; always been slaving for others. You've never had time to think whether you're happy or not, or whether you've got a problem--that's what people call things, when they're got so much time on their hands that they make a play of their inside feelings and work it up till it sets them crazy."

Mrs. Tynan's mouth tightened and her brow clouded. "I've had my problems too, but I always made quick work of them. They never had a chance to overlay me like a mother overlays her baby and kills it."

"Not 'like a mother overlays,' but 'as a mother overlays,'" returned Kitty with a queer note to her voice. "That's what they taught me at

school. The teacher was always picking us up on that kind of thing. I said a thing worse than that when Mrs. Crozier"--her fingers motioned towards another room--"came to-day. I don't know what possessed me. I was off my trolley, I suppose, as John Sibley puts it. Well, when Mrs. James Shiel Gathorne Crozier said--oh, so sweetly and kindly--'You are Miss Tynan?' what do you think I replied? I said to her, 'The same!'"

Rather an acidly satisfied smile came to Mrs. Tynan's lips. "That was like the Slatterly girls," she replied. "Your father would have said it was the vernacular of the rail-head. He was a great man for odd words, but he knew always just what he wanted to say and he said it out. You've got his gift. You always say the right thing, and I don't know why you made that break with her--of all people."

A meditative look came into Kitty's eyes. "Mr. Crozier says every one has an imp that loves to tease us, and trip us up, and make us appear ridiculous before those we don't want to have any advantage over us."

"I don't want Mrs. Crozier to have any advantage over you and me, I can tell you that. Things'll never be the same here again, Kitty dear, and we've all got on so well; with him so considerate of every one, and a good friend always, and just one of us, and his sickness making him seem like our own, and--"

"Oh, hush--will you hush, mother!" interposed Kitty sharply. "He's going away with her back to the old country, and we might just as well think about getting other borders, for I suppose Mr. Bulrush and his bonny bride will set up a little bulrush tabernacle on the banks of the Nile"--she nodded in the direction of the river outside--"and they'll find a little Moses and will treat it as their very own."

"Kitty, how can you!"

Kitty shrugged a shoulder. "It would be ridiculous for that pair to have one of their own. It's only the young mother with a new baby that looks natural to me."

"Don't talk that way, Kitty," rejoined her mother sharply. "You aren't fit to judge of such things."

"I will be before long," said her daughter. "Anyway, Mrs. Crozier isn't any better able to talk than I am," she added irrelevantly. "She never was a mother."

"Don't blame her," said Mrs. Tynan severely. "That's God's business. I'd be sorry for her, so far as that was concerned, if I were you. It's not her fault."

"It's an easy way of accounting for good undone," returned Kitty. "P'r'aps it was God's fault, and p'r'aps if she had loved him more--"

Mrs. Tynan's face flushed with sudden irritation and that fretful look came to her eyes which accompanies a lack of comprehension. "Upon my

word, well, upon my word, of all the vixens that ever lived, and you looking like a yellow pansy and too sweet for daily use! Such thoughts in your head! Who'd have believed that you--!"

Kitty made a mocking face at her mother. "I'm more than a girl, I'm a woman, mother, who sees life all around me, from the insect to the mountain, and I know things without being told. I always did. Just life and living tell me things, and maybe, too, the Irish in me that father was."

"It's so odd. You're such a mixture of fun and fancy, at least you always have been; but there's something new in you these days. Kitty, you make me afraid--yes, you make your mother afraid. After what you said the other day about Mr. Crozier I've had bad nights, and I get nervous thinking."

Kitty suddenly got up, put her arm round her mother and kissed her. "You needn't be afraid of me, mother. If there'd been any real danger, I wouldn't have told you. Mr. Crozier's away, and when he comes back he'll find his wife here, and there's the end of everything. If there'd been danger, it would have been settled the night before he went away. I kissed him that night as he was sleeping out there under the trees."

Mrs. Tynan sat down weakly and fanned herself with her apron. "Oh, oh, oh, dear Lord!" she said. "I'm not afraid to tell you anything I ever did, mother," declared Kitty firmly; "though I'm not prepared to tell you everything I've felt. I kissed him as he slept. He didn't wake, he just lay there sleeping--sleeping." A strange, distant, dreaming look came into her eyes. She smiled like one who saw a happy vision, and an eerie expression stole into her face. "I didn't want him to wake," she continued. "I asked God not to let him wake. If he'd waked--oh, I'd have been ashamed enough till the day I died in one way! Still he'd have understood, and he'd have thought no harm. But it wouldn't have been fair to him--and there's his wife in there," she added, breaking off into a different tone. "They're a long way above us--up among the peaks, and we're at the foot of the foothills, mother; but he never made us feel that, did he? The difference between him and most of the men I've ever seen! The difference!"

"There's the Young Doctor," said her mother reproachfully.

"He-him! He's by himself, with something of every sort in him from the top to the bottom. There's been a ditcher in his family, and there may have been a duke. But Shiel Crozier--Shiel"--she flushed as she said the name like that, but a little touch of defiance came into her face too--"he is all of one kind. He's not a blend. And he's married to her in there!"

"You needn't speak in that tone about her. She's as fine as can be."

"She's as fine as a bee," retorted Kitty. Again she laughed that almost mirthless laugh for which her mother had called her to account a moment before. "You asked me a while ago what I was laughing at, mother," she

continued. "Why, can't you guess? Mr. Crozier talked of her always as though she was--well, like the pictures you've seen of Britannia, all swelling and spreading, with her hand on a shield and her face saying, 'Look at me and be good,' and her eyes saying, 'Son of man, get upon thy knees!' Why, I expected to see a sort of great--goodness--gracious goddess, that kept him frightened to death of her. Bless you, he never opened her letter, he was so afraid of her; and he used to breathe once or twice hard--like that, when he mentioned her!" She breathed in such mock awe that her mother laughed with a little kindly malice too.

"Even her letter," Kitty continued remorselessly, "it was as though she--that little sprite--wrote it with a rod of chastisement, as the Bible says. It--"

"What do you know of the inside of that letter?" asked her mother, staring.

"What the steam of the tea-kettle could let me see," responded Kitty defiantly; and then, to her shocked mother, she told what she had done, and what the nature of the letter was.

"I wanted to help him if I could, and I think I'll be able to do it--I've worked it all out," Kitty added eagerly, with a glint of steel in the gold of her eyes and a fantastic kind of wisdom in her look.

"Kitty," said her mother severely and anxiously, "it's madness interfering with other people's affairs--of that kind. It never was any use."

"This will be the exception to the rule," returned Kitty. "There she is"--again she flicked a hand towards the other room--"after they've been parted five years. Well, she came after she read my letter to her, and after I'd read that unopened letter to him, which made me know how to put it all to her. I've got intuition--that's Celtic and mad," she added, with her chin thrusting out at her mother, to whom the Irish that her husband had been, which was so deep in her daughter, was ever a mystery to her, and of which she was more or less afraid.

"I've got a plan, and I believe--I know--it will work," Kitty continued. "I've been thinking and thinking, and if there's trouble between them; if he says he isn't going on with her till he's made his fortune; if he throws that unopened letter in her face, I'll bring in my invention to deal with the problem, and then you'll see! But all this fuss for a little tiny button of a thing like that in there--pshaw! Mr. Crozier is worth a real queen with the beauty of one of the Rhine maidens. How he used to tell that story of the Rhinegold--do you remember? Wasn't it grand? Well, I am glad now that he's going--yes, whatever trouble there may be, still he is going. I feel it in my heart."

She paused, and her eyes took on a sombre tone. Presently, with a slight, husky pain in her voice, like the faint echo of a wail, she went on: "Now that he's going, I'm glad we've had the things he gave us, things that can't be taken away from us. What you have enjoyed is yours

for ever and ever. It's memory; and for one moment or for one day or one year of those things you loved, there's fifty years, perhaps, for memory. Don't you remember the verses I cut out of the magazine:

"Time, the ruthless idol-breaker,
Smileless, cold iconoclast,
Though he rob us of our altars,
Cannot rob us of the past."

"That's the way your father used to talk," replied her mother. "There's a lot of poetry in you, Kitty." "More than there is in her?" asked Kitty, again indicating the region where Mrs. Crozier was.

"There's as much poetry in her as there is in--in me. But she can do things; that little bit of a babywoman can do things, Kitty. I know women, and I tell you that if that woman hadn't a penny, she'd set to and earn it; and if her husband hadn't a penny, she'd make his home comfortable just the same somehow, for she's as capable as can be. She had her things unpacked, her room in order herself--she didn't want your help or mine--and herself with a fresh dress on before you could turn round."

Kitty's eyes softened still more. "Well, if she'd been poor he would never have left her, and then they wouldn't have lost five years--think of it, five years of life with the man you love lost to you!--and there wouldn't be this tough old knot to untie now."

"She has suffered--that little sparrow has suffered, I tell you, Kitty. She has a grip on herself like--like--"

"Like Mr. Crozier with a broncho under his hand," interjected Kitty. "She's too neat, too eternally spick and span for me, mother. It's as though the Being that made her said, 'Now I'll try and see if I can produce a model of a grown-up, full-sized piece of my work.' Mrs. Crozier is an exhibition model, and Shiel Crozier's over six feet three, and loose and free, and like a wapiti in his gait. If he was a wapiti he'd carry the finest pair of antlers ever was."

"Kitty, you make me laugh," responded the puzzled woman. "I declare, you're the most whimsical creature, and--"

At that moment there came a tapping at the door behind them, and a small, silvery voice said, "May I come in?" as the door opened and Mrs. Crozier, very precisely yet prettily dressed, entered.

"Please make yourself at home--no need to rap," answered Mrs. Tynan. "Out in the West here we live in the open like. There's no room closed to you, if you can put up with what there is, though it's not what you're used to."

"For five months in the year during the past five years I've lived in a house about half as large as this," was Mrs. Crozier's reply. "With my husband away there wasn't the need of much room."

"Well, he only has one room here," responded Mrs. Tynan. "He never seemed too crowded in it."

"Where is it? Might I see it?" asked the small, dark-eyed, dark-haired wife, with the little touch of nectarine bloom and a little powder also; and though she spoke in a matter-of-fact tone, there was a look of wistfulness in her eyes, a gleam of which Kitty caught ere it passed.

"You've been separated, Mrs. Crozier," answered the elder woman, "and I've no right to let you into his room without his consent. You've had no correspondence at all for five years--isn't that so?"

"Did he tell you that?" the regal little lady asked composedly, but with an underglow of anger in her eyes.

"He told the court that at the Logan Trial," was the reply.

"At the murder trial--he told that?" Mrs. Crozier asked almost mechanically, her face gone pale and a little haggard.

"He was obliged to answer when that wolf, Gus Burlingame, was after him," interposed Kitty with kindness in her tone, for, suddenly, she saw through the outer walls of the little wife's being into the inner courts. She saw that Mrs. Crozier loved her husband now, whatever she had done in the past. The sight of love does not beget compassion in a loveless heart, but there was love in Kitty's heart; and it was even greater than she would have wished any human being to see; and by it she saw with radium clearness through the veil of the other woman's being.

"Surely he could have avoided answering that," urged Mona Crozier bitterly.

"Only by telling a lie," Kitty quickly answered, "and I don't believe he ever told a lie in his life. Come," she added, "I will show you his room. My mother needn't do it, and so she won't be responsible. You have your rights as a wife until they're denied you. You mustn't come, mother," she said to Mrs. Tynan, and she put a tender hand on her arm.

"This way," she added to the little person in the pale blue, which suited well her very dark hair, blue eyes, and rose-touched cheeks.

CHAPTER XIII

KITTY SPEAKS HER MIND AGAIN

A moment later they stood inside Shiel Crozier's room. The first glance his wife gave took in the walls, the table, the bureau, and the desk which contained her own unopened letter. She was looking for a photograph of herself.

There was none in the room, and an arid look came into her face. The glance and its sequel did not escape Kitty's notice. She knew well--as who would not?--what Mona Crozier was hoping to see, and she was human enough to feel a kind of satisfaction in the wife's chagrin and disappointment; for the unopened letter in the baize-covered desk which she had read was sufficient warrant for a punishment and penalty due the little lady, and not the less because it was so long delayed. Had not Shiel Crozier had his draught of bitter herbs to drink over the past five years?

Moreover, Kitty was sure beyond any doubt at all that Shiel Crozier's wife, when she wrote the letter, did not love her husband, or at least did not love him in the right or true way. She loved him only so far as her then selfish nature permitted her to do; only in so far as the pride of money which she had, and her husband had not, did not prevent; only in so far as the nature of a tyrant could love--though the tyranny was pink and white and sweetly perfumed and had the lure of youth. In her primitive way Kitty had intuitively apprehended the main truth, and that was enough to justify her in contributing to Mona Crozier's punishment.

Kitty's perceptions were true. At the start, Mona was in nature proportionate to her size; and when she married she had not loved Crozier as he had loved her. Maybe that was why--though he may not have admitted it to himself--he could not bear to be beholden to her when his ruin came. Love makes all things possible, and there is no humiliation in taking from one who loves and is loved, that uncapitalised and communal partnership which is not of the earth earthy. Perhaps that was why, though Shiel loved her, he had had a bitterness which galled his soul; why he had a determination to win sufficient wealth to make himself independent of her. Down at the bottom of his chivalrous Irish heart he had learned the truth, that to be dependent on her would beget in her contempt for him, and he would be only her paid paramour and not her husband in the true sense. Quixotic he had been, but under his quixotism there was at least the shadow of a great tragical fact, and it had made him a matrimonial deserter. Whether tragedy or comedy would emerge was all on the knees of the gods.

"It's a nice room, isn't it?" asked Kitty when there had passed from Mona Crozier's eyes the glaze or mist--not of tears, but stupefaction--which had followed her inspection of the walls, the bureau, the table, and the desk.

"Most comfortable, and so very clean--quite spotless," the wife answered admiringly, and yet drearily. It made her feel humiliated that her man could live this narrow life of one room without despair, with sufficient resistance to the lure of her hundred and fifty thousand pounds and her own delicate and charming person. Here, it would seem, he was content. One easy-chair, made out of a barrel, a couch, a bed--a very narrow bed, like a soldier's, a bed for himself alone--a small table, a shelf on the wall with a dozen books, a little table, a bureau, and an old-fashioned, sloping-topped, shallow desk covered with green baize, on high legs, so that like a soldier too he could stand as he wrote (Crozier had made that

high stand for the desk himself). That was what the room conveyed to her--the spirit of the soldier, bare, clean, strong, sparse: a workshop and a chamber of sleep in one, like the tent of an officer on the march. After the feeling had come to her, to heighten the sensation she espied a little card hung under the small mirror on the wall. There was writing on it, and going nearer, she saw in red pencil the words, "Courage, soldier!"

These were the words which Kitty was so fond of using, and the girl had a thrill of triumph now as she saw the woman from whom Crozier had fled looking at the card. She herself had come and looked at it many times since Crozier had gone, for he had only put it there just before he left on his last expedition to Aspen Vale to carry through his deal. It had brought a great joy to Kitty's heart. It had made her feel that she had some share in his life; that, in a way, she had helped him on the march, the vivandiere who carried the water-bag which would give him drink when parched, battle-worn, or wounded.

Mona Crozier turned away from the card, sadly reflecting that nothing in the room recalled herself; that she was not here in the very core of his life in even the smallest way. Yet this girl, this sunny creature with the call of youth and passion in her eyes, this Ruth of the wheat-fields, came and went here as though she was a part of it. She did this and that for him, and she was no doubt on such terms of intimacy with him that they were really part of each other's life in a scheme of domesticity unlike any boarding-house organization she had ever known. Here in everything there was the air, the decorum, and the unartificial comfort of home.

This was why he could live without his wedded wife and her gold and her brocade, and the silk and the Persian rugs, and the grand piano and the carriages and the high silk hat from Piccadilly. Her husband had had the luxuries of wealth, and here he was living like a Spartan on his hill--and alone; though he had a wife whom men had besieged both before and after marriage. A feeling of impotent indignation suddenly took possession of her. Here he was with two women, unattached,--one interesting and good and agreeable and good-looking, and the other almost a beauty,--who were part of the whole rustic scheme in which he lived. They made him comfortable, they did the hundred things that a valet or a fond wife would do; they no doubt hung on every word he uttered--and he could be interesting beyond most men. She had realised terribly how interesting he was after he had fled; when men came about her and talked to her in many ways, with many variations, but always with the one tune behind all they said; always making for the one goal, whatever the point from which they started or however circuitous their route.

As time went on she had hungrily longed to see her husband again, and other men had no power to interest her; but still she had not sought to find him. At first it had been offended pride, injured self-esteem, in which the value of her own desirable self and of her very desirable fortune was not lost; then it became the pride of a wife in whom the spirit of the eternal woman was working; and she would have died rather than have sought to find him. Five years--and not a word from him.

Five years--and not a letter from him! Her eyes involuntarily fell on the high desk with the greenbaize top. Of all the letters he had written at that desk not one had been addressed to her. Slowly, and with an unintentional solemnity, she went up to it and laid a hand upon it. Her chin only cleared the edge of it--he was a tall man, her husband.

"This is the place of secrets, I suppose?" she said, with a bright smile and an attempt at gaiety to Kitty, who had watched her with burning eyes; for she had felt the thrill of the moment. She was as sensitive to atmosphere of this sad play of life as nearly and as vitally as the deserted wife.

"I shouldn't think it a place of secrets," Kitty answered after a moment. "He seldom locks it, and when he does I know where the key is."

"Indeed?" Mona Crozier stiffened. A look of reproach came into her eyes. It was as though she was looking down from a great height upon a poor creature who did not know the first rudiments of personal honour, the fine elemental customs of life.

Kitty saw and understood, but she did not hasten to reply, or to set things right. She met the lofty look unflinchingly, and she had pride and some little malice too--it would do Mrs. Crozier good, she thought--in saying, as she looked down on the humming-bird trying to be an eagle:

"I've had to get things for him--papers and so on, and send them on when he was away, and even when he was at home I've had to act for him; and so even when it was locked I had to know where the key was. He asked me to help him that way."

Mona noted the stress laid upon the word home, and for the first time she had a suspicion that this girl knew more than even the Logan Trial had disclosed, and that she was being satirical and suggestive.

"Oh, of course," she returned cheerfully in response to Kitty--"you acted as a kind of clerk for him!" There was a note in her voice which she might better not have used. If she but knew it, she needed this girl's friendship very badly. She ought to have remembered that she would not have been here in her husband's room had it not been for the letter Kitty had written--a letter which had made her heart beat so fast when she received it, that she had sunk helpless to the floor on one of those soft rugs, representing the soft comfort which wealth can bring.

The reply was like a slap in the face.

"I acted for him in any way at all that he wished me to," Kitty answered, with quiet boldness and shining, defiant face.

Mona's hand fell away from the green baize desk, and her eyes again lost their sight for a moment. Kitty was not savage by nature. She had been goaded as much by the thought of the letter Crozier's wife had written to him in the hour of his ruin as by the presence of the woman in this

house, where things would never be as they had been before. She had struck hard, and now she was immediately sorry for it: for this woman was here in response to her own appeal; and, after all, she might well be jealous of the fact that Crozier had had close to him for so long and in such conditions a girl like herself, younger than his own wife, and prettier--yes, certainly prettier, she admitted to herself.

"He is that kind of a man. What he asked for, any good woman could give and not be sorry," Kitty convincingly added when the knife had gone deep enough.

"Yes, he was that kind of a man," responded the other gently now, and with a great sigh of relief. Suddenly she came nearer and touched Kitty's arm. "And thank you for saying so," she added. "He and I have been so long parted, and you have seen so much more of him than I have of late years! You know him better--as he is. If I said something sharp just now, please forgive me. I am--indeed, I am grateful to you and your mother."

She paused. It was hard for her to say what she felt she must say, for she did not know how her husband would receive her--he had done without her for so long; and she might need this girl and her mother sorely. The girl was a friend in the best sense, or she would not have sent for her. She must remind herself of this continually lest she should take wrong views.

Kitty nodded, but for a moment she did not reply. Her hand was on the baize-covered desk. All at once, with determination in her eyes, she said: "You didn't use him right or you'd not have been parted for five years. You were rich and he was poor, he is poor now, though he may be rich any day, and he wouldn't stay with you because he wouldn't take your money to live on. If you had been a real wife to him he wouldn't have seen that he'd be using your money; he'd have taken it as though it was his own, out of the purse always open and belonging to both, just as though you were partners. You must feel--"

"Hush, for pity's sake, hush!" interrupted the other.

"You are going to see him again," Kitty persisted. "Now, don't you think it just as well to know what the real truth is?"

"How do you know what is the truth?" asked the trembling little stranger with a last attempt to hold her position, to conceal from herself the actual facts.

"The Young Doctor and my mother and I were with him all the time he was ill after he was shot, and the Trial had only told half the truth. He wanted us, his best friends here, to know the whole truth, so he told us that he left you because he couldn't bear to live on your money. It was you made him feel that, though he didn't say so. All the time he told his story he spoke of you as though you were some goddess, some great queen--"

A look of hope, of wonder, of relief came into the tiny creature's eyes.

"He spoke like that of me; he said--?"

"He said what no one else would have said, probably; but that's the way with people in love--they see what no one else sees, they think what no one else thinks. He talked with a sort of hush in his voice about you till we thought you must be some stately, tall, splendid Helen of Troy with a soul like an ocean, instead of"--she was going to say something that would have seemed unkind, and she stopped herself in time--"instead of a sort of fairy, one of the little folk that never grow up; the same as my father used to tell me about."

"You think very badly of me, then?" returned the other with a sigh. Her courage, her pride, her attempt to control the situation had vanished suddenly, and she became for the moment almost the child she looked.

"We've only just begun. We're all his friends here, and we'll judge you and think of you according to what happens between you and him. You wrote him that letter!"

She suddenly placed her hand on the desk as the inspiration came to her to have this matter of the letter out now, and to have Mrs. Crozier know exactly what the position was, no matter what might be thought of herself. She was only thinking of Shiel Crozier and his future now.

"What letter did I write?" There was real surprise and wonder in her tone.

"That last letter you wrote to him--the letter in which you gave him fits for breaking his promise, and talked like a proud, angry angel from the top of the stairs."

"How do you know of that letter? He, my husband, told you what was in that letter; he showed it to you?" The voice was indignant, low, and almost rough with anger.

"Yes, your husband showed me the letter--unopened."

"Unopened--I do not understand." Mona steadied herself against the foot of the bed and looked in a helpless way at Kitty. Her composure was gone, though she was very quiet, and she had that look of a vital absorption which possesses human beings in crises of their lives.

Suddenly Kitty took from behind a book on the shelf a key, opened the desk, and drew out the letter which Crozier had kept sealed and unopened all the years, which he had never read.

"Do you know that?" Kitty asked, and held it out for Mrs. Crozier to see.

Two dark blue eyes stared confusedly at the letter--at her own handwriting. Kitty turned it over. "You see it is closed as it was when you sent it to him. He has never opened it. He does not know what is in

it."

"He has-kept it--five years--unopened," Mona said in broken phrases scarce above a whisper.

"He has never opened it, as you see."

"Give--give it to me," the wife said, stepping forward to stay Kitty's hand as she opened the lid of the desk to replace the letter.

"It's not your letter--no, you shall not," said Kitty firmly as she jerked aside the hand laid upon her wrist, and threw one arm on the lid, holding it down as Mrs. Crozier tried to keep it open. Then with a swift action of the free hand she locked the desk and put the key in her pocket.

"If you destroyed this letter he would never believe but that it was worse than it is; and it is bad enough, Heaven knows, for any woman to have written to her husband--or to any one else's husband. You thought you were the centre of the world when you wrote that letter. Without a penny, he would be a great man, with a great future; but you are only a pretty little woman with a fortune, who has thought a great lot of herself, and far too much of herself only, when she wrote that letter."

"How do you know what is in it?" There was agony and challenge at once in the other's voice. "Because I read it--oh, don't look so shocked! I'd do it again. I knew just how to act when I'd read it. I steamed it open and closed it up again. Then I wrote to you. I'm not sorry I did it. My motive was a good one. I wanted to help him. I wanted to understand everything, so that I'd know best what to do. Though he's so far above us in birth and position, he seemed in one way like our own. That's the way it is in new countries like this. We don't think of lots of things that you finer people in the old countries do, and we don't think evil till it trips us up. In a new country all are strangers among the pioneers, and they have to come together. This town is only twenty years old, and scarcely anybody knew each other at the start. We had to take each other on trust, and we think the best as long as we can. Mr. Crozier came to live with us, and soon he was just part of our life--not a boarder; not some one staying the night who paid you what he owed you in the morning. He was a friend you could say your prayers with, or eat your meals with, or ride a hundred miles with, and just take it as a matter of course; for he was part of what you were part of, all this out here--don't you understand?"

"I am trying hard to do so," was the reply in a hushed voice. Here was a world, here were people of whom Mona Crozier had never dreamed. They were so much of an antique time--far behind the time that her old land represented; not a new world, but the oldest world of all. She began to understand the girl also, and her face took on a comprehending look, as with eyes like bronze suns Kitty continued:

"So, though it was wrong--wicked--in one way, I read the letter, to do some good by it, if it could be done. If I hadn't read it you wouldn't

be here. Was it worth while?"

At that moment there was a knock at the outer door of the other room, or, rather, on the lintel of it. Mona started. Suppose it was her husband --that was her thought.

Kitty read the look. "No, it isn't Mr. Crozier. It's the Young Doctor. I know his knock. Will you come and see him?"

The wife was trembling, she was very pale, her eyes were rather staring, but she fought to control herself. It was evident that Kitty expected her to do so. It was also quite certain that Kitty meant to settle things now, in so far as it could be done.

"He knows as much as you do?" asked Mrs. Crozier.

"No, the Young Doctor hasn't read the letter and I haven't told him what's in it; but he knows that I read it, and what he doesn't know he guesses. He is Mr. Crozier's honest, clever friend. I've got an idea-- an invention to put this thing right. It's a good one. You'll see. But I want the Young Doctor to know about it. He never has to think twice. He knows what to do the very first time."

A moment later they were in the other room, with the Young Doctor smiling down at "the little spot of a woman," as he called Crozier's wife.

CHAPTER XIV

AWAITING THE VERDICT

"You look quite settled and at home," the Young Doctor remarked, as he offered Mrs. Crozier a chair. She took it, for never in her life had she felt so small physically since coming to the great, new land. The islands where she was born were in themselves so miniature that the minds of their people, however small, were not made to feel insignificant. But her mind, which was, after all, vastly larger in proportion than the body enshrining it, felt suddenly that both were lost in a universe. Her impulse was to let go and sink into the helplessness of tears, to be overwhelmed by an unconquerable loneliness; but the Celtic courage in her, added to that ancient native pride which prevents one woman from giving way before another woman towards whom she bears jealousy, prevented her from showing the weakness she felt. Instead, it roused her vanity and made her choose to sit down, so disguising perceptibly the disparity of height which gave Kitty an advantage over her and made the Young Doctor like some menacing Polynesian god.

Both these people had an influence and authority in Mona Crozier's life which now outweighed the advantage wealth gave her. Her wealth had not kept her husband beside her when delicate and perfumed tyranny began to flutter its banners of control over him. Her fortune had driven him

forth when her beauty and her love ought to have kept him close to her, whatever fate might bring to their door, or whatever his misfortune or the catastrophe falling on him. It was all deeply humiliating, and the inward dejection made her now feel that her body was the last effort of a failing creative power. So she sat down instead of standing up in a vain effort at retrieval.

The Young Doctor sat down also, but Kitty did not, and in her buoyant youth and command of the situation she seemed Amazonian to Mona's eyes. It must be said for Kitty that she remained standing only because a restlessness had seized her which was not present when she was with Mona in Crozier's room. It was now as though something was going to happen which she must face standing; as though something was coming out of the unknown and forbidding future and was making itself felt before its time. Her eyes were almost painfully bright as she moved about the room doing little things. Presently she began to lay a cloth and place dishes silently on the table--long before the proper time, as her mother reminded her when she entered for a moment and then quickly passed on into the kitchen, at a warning glance from Kitty, which said that the Young Doctor and Mona were not to be disturbed.

"Well, Askatoon is a place where one feels at home quickly," added the Young Doctor, as Mona did not at once respond to his first remark.

"Every one who comes here always feels as though he--or she--owns the place. It's the way the place is made. The trouble with most of us is that we want to put the feeling into practice and take possession of 'all and sundry.' Isn't that true, Miss Tynan?"

"As true as most things you say," retorted Kitty, as she flicked the white tablecloth. "If mother and I hadn't such wonderful good health I suppose you'd come often enough here to give you real possession. Do you know, Mrs. Crozier," she added, with her wistful eyes vainly trying to be merely mischievous, "he once charged me five dollars for torturing me like a Red Indian. I had put my elbow out of joint, and he put it in again with his knee and both hands, as though it was the wheel of a wagon and he was trying to put on the tire."

"Well, you were running round soon after," answered the Young Doctor.

"But as for the five dollars, I only took it to keep you quiet. So long as you had a grievance you would talk and talk and talk, and you never were so astonished in your life as when I took that five dollars."

"I've taken care never to dislocate my elbow since."

"No, not your elbow," remarked the Young Doctor meaningly, and turned to Mona, who had now regained her composure.

"Well, I shan't call you in to reduce the dislocation--that's the medical term, isn't it?" persisted Kitty, with fire in her eyes.

"What is the dislocation?" asked Mona, with a subtle, inquiring look but a manner which conveyed interest.

The Young Doctor smiled. "It's only her way of saying that my mind is unhinged and that I ought to be sent to a private hospital for two."

"No--only one," returned Kitty.

"Marriage means common catastrophe, doesn't it?" he asked quizzically.

"Generally it means that one only is permanently injured," replied Kitty, lifting a tumbler and looking through it at him as though to see if the glass was properly polished.

Mona was mystified. At first she thought there had been oblique references to her husband, but these remarks about marriage would certainly exclude him. Yet, would they exclude him? During the time in which Shiel's history was not known might there not have been--but no, it could not have been so, for it was Kitty who had sent the letter which had brought her to Askatoon.

"Are you to be married--soon?" she asked of Kitty, with a friendly yet trembling smile, for her agitation was, despite appearances, troubling every nerve.

"I've thought of it quite lately," responded Kitty calmly, seating herself now and looking straight into the eyes of the woman, who was suggesting more truth than she knew.

"May I congratulate you? Am I justified on such slight acquaintance? I am sure you have chosen wisely," was the smooth rejoinder.

Kitty did not shrink from looking Mona in the eyes. "It isn't quite time for congratulations yet, and I'm not sure I've chosen wisely. My family very strongly disapproves. I can't help that, of course, and I may have to elope and take the consequences."

"It takes two to elope," interposed the Young Doctor, who thought that Kitty, in her humorous extravagance, was treading very dangerous ground indeed. He was thinking of Crozier and Kitty; but Kitty was thinking of Crozier, and meaning John Sibley. Somehow she could not help playing with this torturing thing in the presence of the wife of the man who was the real "man in possession" so far as her life was concerned.

"Why, he is waiting on the doorstep," replied Kitty boldly and referring only to John Sibley.

At that minute there was the crunch of gravel on the pathway and the sound of a quick footstep. Kitty and Mona were on their feet at once. Both recognised the step of Shiel Crozier. Presently the Young Doctor recognised it also, but he rose with more deliberation.

At that instant a voice calling from the road arrested Crozier's advance to the open door of the room where they were. It was Jesse Bulrush asking a question. Crozier paused in his progress, and in the moment's time it gave, Kitty, with a swift look of inquiry and with a burst of the

real soul in her, caught the hand of Crozier's wife and pressed it warmly. Then, with a face flushed and eyes that looked straight ahead of her, she left the room as the Young Doctor went to the doorway and stepped outside. Within ten feet of the door he met Crozier.

"How goes it, patient?" he said, standing in Crozier's way. Being a man who thought much and wisely for other people, he wanted to give the wife time to get herself in control.

"Right enough in your sphere of operations," answered Crozier.

"And not so right in other fields, eh?"

"I've come back after a fruitless hunt. They've got me, the thieves!" said Crozier, with a look which gave his long face an almost tragic austerity. Then suddenly the look changed, the mediaeval remoteness passed, and a thought flashed up into his eyes which made his expression alive with humour.

"Isn't it wonderful, that just when a man feels he wants a rope to hang himself with, the rope isn't to be had?" he exclaimed. "Before he can lay his hands on it he wants to hang somebody else, and then he has to pause whether he will or no. Did I ever tell you the story of the old Irishwoman who lived down at Kenmare, in Kerry? Well, she used to sit at her doorway and lament the sorrows of the world with a depth of passion that you'd think never could be assuaged. 'Oh, I fale so bad, I am so wake--oh, I do fale so bad,' she used to say. 'I wish some wan would take me by the ear and lade me round to the ould shebeen, and set me down, and fill a noggen of whusky and make me dhrink it--whether I would or no!' Whether I would or no I have to drink the cup of self-denial," Crozier continued, "though Bradley and his gang have closed every door against me here, and I've come back without what I went for at Aspen Vale, for my men were away. I've come back without what I went for, but I must just grin and bear it." He shrugged his shoulders and gave a great sigh.

"Perhaps you'll find what you went for here," returned the Young Doctor meaningly.

"There's a lot here--enough to make a man think life worth while"--inside the room the wife shrank at the words, for she could hear all--"but just the same I'm not thinking the thing I went to look for is hereabouts."

"You never know your luck," was the reply. "'Ask and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.'"

The long face blazed up with humour again. "Do you mean that I haven't asked you yet?" Crozier remarked, with a quizzical look, which had still that faint hope against hope which is a painful thing for a good man's eyes to see.

The Young Doctor laid a hand on Crozier's arm. "No, I didn't mean that, patient. I'm in that state when every penny I have is out to keep me

from getting a fall. I'm in that Starwhon coal-mine down at Bethbridge, and it's like a suction-pump. I couldn't borrow a thousand dollars myself now. I can't do it, or I'd stand in with you, Crozier. No, I can't help you a bit; but step inside. There's a room in this house where you got back your life by the help of a knife. There's another room in there where you may get back your fortune by the help of a wife."

Stepping aside he gave the wondering Crozier a slight push forward into the doorway, then left him and hurried round to the back of the house, where he hoped he might see Kitty.

The Young Doctor found Kitty pumping water on a pail of potatoes and stirring them with a broom-handle.

"A most unscientific way of cleaning potatoes," he said, as Kitty did not look at him. "If you put them in a trough where the water could run off, the dirt would go with the water, and you would'nt waste time and intelligence, and your fingers would be cleaner in the end."

The only reply Kitty made was to flick the broomhead at him. It had been dipped in water, and the spray from it slightly spattered his face.

"Will you never grow up?" he exclaimed as he applied a handkerchief to his ruddy face.

"I'd like you so much better if you were younger--will you never be young?" she asked.

"It makes a man old before his time to have to meet you day by day and live near you."

"Why don't you try living with me?" she retorted. "Ah, then, you meant me when you said to Mrs. Crozier that you were going to be married? Wasn't that a bit 'momentary'? as my mother's cook used to remark. I think we haven't 'kept company'--you and I"

"It's true you haven't been a beau of mine, but I'd rather marry you than be obliged to live with you," was the paradoxical retort.

"You have me this time," he said, trying in vain to solve her reply.

Kitty tossed her head. "No, I haven't got you this time, thank Heaven, and I don't want you; but I'd rather marry you than live with you, as I said. Isn't it the custom for really nice-minded people to marry to get rid of each other--for five years, or for ever and ever and ever?"

"What a girl you are, Kitty Tynan!" he said reprovingly. He saw that she meant Crozier and his wife.

Kitty ceased her work for an instant and, looking away from him into the distance, said: "Three people said those same words to me all in one day a thousand years ago. It was Mr. Crozier, Jesse Bulrush, and my mother; and now you've said it a thousand years after; as with your inexpensive

education and slow mind you'd be sure to do."

"I have an idea that Mrs. Crozier said the same to you also this very day. Did she--come, did she?"

"She didn't say, 'What a girl you are!' but in her mind she probably did say, 'What a vixen!'"

The Young Doctor nodded satirically. "If you continued as you began when coming from the station, I'm sure she did; and also I'm sure it wasn't wrong of her to say it."

"I wanted her to say it. That's why I uttered the too, too utter-things, as the comic opera says. What else was there to do? I had to help cure her."

"To cure her of what, miss?"

"Of herself, doctor-man."

The Young Doctor's look became graver. He wondered greatly at this young girl's sage instinct and penetration. "Of herself? Ah, yes, to think more of some one else than herself! That is--"

"Yes, that is love," Kitty answered, her head bent over the pail and stirring the potatoes hard.

"I suppose it is," he answered.

"I know it is," she returned.

"Is that why you are going to be married?" he asked quizzically.

"It will probably cure the man I marry of himself," she retorted. "Oh, neither of us know what we are talking about--let's change the subject!" she added impatiently now, with a change of mood, as she poured the water off the potatoes.

There was a moment's silence in which they were both thinking of the same thing. "I wonder how it's all going inside there?" he remarked.

"I hope all right, but I have my doubts."

"I haven't any doubt at all. It isn't going right," she answered ruefully; "but it has to be made go right."

"Whom do you think can do that?"

Kitty looked him frankly and decisively in the face. Her eyes had the look of a dreaming pietist for the moment. The deep-sea soul of her was awake. "I can do it if they don't break away altogether at once. I helped her more than you think. I told her I had opened that letter."

He gasped. "My dear girl--that letter--you told her you had done such a

thing, such--!"

"Don't dear girl me, if you please. I know what I am doing. I told her that and a great deal more. She won't leave this house the woman she was yesterday. She is having a quick cure--a cure while you wait."

"Perhaps he is cured of her," remarked the Young Doctor very gravely.

"No, no, the disease might have got headway, but it didn't," Kitty returned, her face turned away. "He became a little better; but he was never cured. That's the way with a man. He can never forget a woman he has once cared for, and he can go back to her half loving her; but it isn't the case with a woman. There's nothing so dead to a woman as a man when she's cured of him. The woman is never dead to the man, no matter what happens."

The Young Doctor regarded her with a strange, new interest and a puzzled surprise. "Sappho--Sappho, how did you come to know these things!" he exclaimed. "You are only a girl at best, or something of a boy-girl at worst, and yet you have, or think you have, got into those places which are reserved for the old-timers in life's scramble. You talk like an ancient dame."

Kitty smiled, but her eyes had a slumbering look as if she was half dreaming. "That's the mistake most of you make--men and women. There's such a thing as instinct, and there's such a thing as keeping your eyes open."

"What did Mrs. Crozier say when you told her about opening that five-year-old letter? Did she hate you?"

Kitty nodded with wistful whimsicality. "For a minute she was like an industrious hornet. Then I made her see she wouldn't have been here at all if I hadn't opened it. That made, her come down from the top of her nest on the church-spire, and she said that, considering my opportunities, I was not such an aboriginal after all."

"Now, look you, Saphira, prospective wife of Ananias, she didn't say that, of course. Still, it doesn't matter, does it? The point is, suppose he opens that letter now."

"If he does, he'll probably not go with her. It was a letter that would send a man out with a scalping-knife. Still, if Mr. Crozier had his land-deal through he might not read the letter as it really is. His brain wouldn't then be grasping what his eyes saw."

"He hasn't got his land-deal through. He told me so just now before he saw her."

"Then it's ora pro nobis--it's pray for us hard," rejoined Kitty sorrowfully. "Poor man from Kerry!" At that moment Mrs. Tynan came from the house, her face flushed, her manner slightly agitated. "John Sibley is here, Kitty--with two saddle-horses.... He says you promised to ride

with him to-day."

"I probably did," responded Kitty calmly. "It's a good day for riding too. But John will have to wait. Please tell him to come back at six o'clock. There'll be plenty of time for an hour's ride before sundown."

"Are you lame, dear child?" asked her mother ironically. "Because if you're not, perhaps you'll be your own messenger. It's no way to treat a friend--or whatever you like to call him."

Kitty smiled tenderly at her mother. "Then would you mind telling him to come here, mother darling? I'm giving this doctor-man a prescription. Ah, please do what I ask you, mother! It is true about the prescription. It's not for himself; it's for the foreign people quarantined inside." She nodded towards the room where Shiel Crozier and his wife were shaping their fate.

As her mother disappeared with a gesture of impatience and the remark that she washed her hands of the whole Sibley business, the Young Doctor said to Kitty, "What is your prescription, Ma'm'selle Saphira? Suppose they come out of quarantine with a clean bill of health?"

"If they do that you needn't make up the prescription. But if Aspen Vale hasn't given him what he wanted, then Mr. Shiel Crozier will still be an exile from home and the angel in the house."

"What is the prescription? Out with your Sibylline leaves!"

"It's in that unopened letter. When the letter is opened you'll see it effervesce like a seidlitz powder."

"But suppose I am not here when the letter is opened?"

"You must be here--you must. You'll stay now, if you please."

"I'm afraid I can't. I have patients waiting." Kitty made an impetuous gesture of command. "There are two patients here who are at the crisis of their disease. You may be wanted to save a life any minute now."

"I thought that with your prescription you were to be the AEsculapius."

"No, I'm only going to save the reputation of AEsculapius by giving him a prescription got from a quack to give to a goose."

"Come, come, no names. You are incorrigible. I believe you'd have your joke on your death-bed."

"I should if you were there. I should die laughing," Kitty retorted.

"There will be no death-bed for you, miss. You'll be translated--no, that's not right; no one could translate you."

"God might--or a man I loved well enough not to marry him."

There was a note of emotion in her laugh as she uttered the words. It did not escape the ear of the Young Doctor, who regarded her fixedly for a moment before he said: "I'm not sure that even He would be able to translate you. You speak your own language, and it's surely original. I am only just learning its alphabet. No one else speaks it. I have a fear that you'll be terribly lonely as you travel along the trail, Kitty Tynan."

A light of pleasure came into Kitty's eyes, though her face was a little drawn. "You really do think I'm original--that I'm myself and not like anybody else?" she asked him with a childlike eagerness.

"Almost more than any one I ever met," answered the Young Doctor gently; for he saw that she had her own great troubles, and he also felt now fully what this comedy or tragedy inside the house meant to her. "But you're terribly lonely--and that's why: because you are the only one of your kind."

"No, that's why I'm not going to be lonely," she said, nodding towards the corner of the house where John Sibley appeared.

Suddenly, with a gesture of confidence and almost of affection, she laid a hand on the Young Doctor's breast. "I've left the trail, doctor-man. I'm cutting across the prairie. Perhaps I shall reach camp and perhaps I shan't; but anyhow I'll know that I met one good man on the way. And I also saw a resthouse that I'd like to have stayed at, but the blinds were drawn and the door was locked."

There was a strange, eerie look in her face again as her eyes of soft umber dwelt on his for a moment; then she turned with a gay smile to John Sibley, who had seen her hand on the Young Doctor's chest without dismay; for the joy of Kitty was that she hid nothing; and, anyhow, the Young Doctor had a place of his own; and also, anyhow, Kitty did what she pleased. Once when she had visited the Coast the Governor had talked to her with great gusto and friendliness; and she had even gone so far as to touch his arm while, chuckling at her whimsically, he listened to a story she told him of life at the rail-head. And the Governor had patted her fingers in quite a fatherly way--or not, as the mind of the observer saw it; while subsequently his secretary had written verses to her.

"So you've been gambling again--you've broken your promise to me," she said reprovingly to Sibley, but with that wonderful, wistful laughter in her eyes.

Sibley looked at her in astonishment. "Who told you?" he asked. It had only happened the night before, and it didn't seem possible she could know.

He was quite right. It wasn't possible she could know, and she didn't know. She only divined.

"I knew when you made the promise you couldn't keep it; that's why I

forgive you now," she added. "Knowing what I did about you, I oughtn't to have let you make it."

The Young Doctor saw in her words a meaning that John Sibley could never have understood, for it was a part of the story of Crozier's life reproduced--and with what a different ending!

CHAPTER XV

"MALE AND FEMALE CREATED HE THEM"

When Crozier stepped out of the bright sunlight into the shady living-room of the Tynan home, his eyes were clouded by the memory of his conference with Studd Bradley and his financial associates, and by the desolate feeling that the five years since he had left England had brought him nothing--nothing at all except a new manhood. But that he did not count an asset, because he had not himself taken account of this new capital. He had never been an introspective man in the philosophic sense, and he never had thought that he was of much account. He had lived long on his luck, and nothing had come of it--"nothing at all, at all," as he said to himself when he stepped inside the room where, unknown to him, his wife awaited him. So abstracted was he, so disturbed was his gaze (fixed on the inner thing), that he did not see the figure in blue and white over against the wall, her hand on the big arm-chair once belonging to Tyndall Tynan, and now used always by Shiel Crozier, "the white-haired boy of the Tynan sanatorium," as Jesse Bulrush had called him.

There was a strange timidity, and a fear not so strange, in Mona's eyes as she saw her husband enter with that quick step which she had so longingly remembered after he had fled from her; but of which she had taken less account when he was with her at Lammis long ago--When Crozier of Lammis was with her long ago. How tall and shapely he was! How large he loomed with the light behind him! How shadowed his face and how distant the look in his eyes.

Somehow the room seemed too small for him, and yet he had lived in this very house for four years and more; he had slept in the next room all that time; had eaten at this table and sat in this very chair--Mrs. Tynan had told her that--for this long time, like the master of a household. With that far-away, brooding look in his face, he seemed in one sense as distant from her as when she was in London in those dreary, desolate years with no knowledge of his whereabouts, a widow in every sense save one; but in her acts--that had to be said for her--a wife always and not a widow. She had not turned elsewhere, though there had been temptation enough to do so.

Crozier advanced to the centre of the room, even to the table laid for dinner, before he was conscious of some one in the room, of a figure by the chair. For a moment he stood still, startled as if he had seen a

vision, and his sight became blurred. When it cleared, Mona had come a step nearer to him, and then he saw her clearly. He caught his breath as though Life had burst upon him with some staggering revelation. If she had been a woman of genius, as in her way Kitty Tynan was, she would have spoken before he had a chance to do so. Instead, she wished to see how he would greet her, to hear what he would say. She was afraid of him now. It was not her gift to do the right thing by perfect instinct; she had to think things out; and so she did now. Still it has to be said for her that she also had a strange, deep sense of apprehension in the presence of the man whose arms had held her fast, and then let her go for so bitter a length of time, in which her pride was lacerated and her heart brought low. She did not know how she was going to be met now, and a womanly shyness held her back. If she had said one word--his name only--it might have made a world of difference to them both at that moment; for he was tortured by failure, and now when hope was gone, here was the woman whom he had left in order to force gifts from fate to bring himself back to her.

"You--you here!" he exclaimed hoarsely. He did not open his arms to her or go a step nearer to her. His look was that of blank amazement, of mingled remembrance and stark realisation. This was a turn of affairs for which he had made no calculation. There had ever been the question of his return to her, but never of her coming to him. Yet here she was, debonnaire and fresh and perfectly appointed--and ah, so terribly neat and spectacularly finessed! Here she was with all that expert formality which, in the old days, had been a reproach to his loosely-swung life and person, to his careless, almost slovenly but well-brushed, cleanly, and polished ease--not like his wife, as though he had been poured out of a mould and set up to dry. He was not tailor-made, and she had ever been so exact that it was as though she had been crystallised, clothes and all--a perfect crystal, yet a crystal. It was this very perfection, so charming to see, but in a sense so inhuman, which had ever dismayed him. "What should I be doing in the home of an angel!" he had exclaimed to himself in the old home at Lammis.

Truth is, he ought never to have had such a feeling, and he would not have had it, if she had diffused the radiance of love, which would have made her outer perfectness mere slovenliness beside her inner charm and magnetism. Very little of all this passed through Crozier's mind, as with confused vision he looked at her. He had borne the ordeal of the witness-box in the Logan Trial with superb coolness; he had been in physical danger over and over again, and had kept his head; he had never been faced by a human being who embarrassed him--except his own wife. "There is no fear like that of one's own wife," was the saying of an ancient philosopher, and Crozier had proved it true; not because of errors committed, but because he was as sensitive as a girl of sensibility; because he felt that his wife did not understand him, and he was ever in fear of doing the wrong thing, while eager beyond telling to please her. After all, during the past five years, parted from her while loving her, there had still been a feeling of relief unexplainable to himself in not having to think whether he was pleasing her or not, or to reproach himself constantly that he was failing to conform to her standard.

"How did you come--why? How did you know?" he asked helplessly, as she made no motion to come nearer; as she kept looking at him with an expression in her eyes wholly unfamiliar to him. Yet it was not wholly unfamiliar, for it belonged to the days when he courted her, when she seemed to have got nearer to him than in the more intimate relations of married life.

"Is--is that all you have to say to me, Shiel?" she asked, with a swelling note of feeling in her voice; while there was also emerging in her look an elusive pride which might quickly become sharp indignation. That her deserter should greet her so after five years of such offence to a woman's self-respect, as might entitle her to become a rebel against matrimony, was too cruel to be borne. This feeling suddenly became alive in her, in spite of a joy in her heart different from that which she had ever known; in defiance of the fact that now that they were together once more, what would she not do to prevent their being driven apart again!

"After abandoning me for five years, is that all you have to say to me, Shiel? After I have suffered before the world--"

He threw up his arms with a passionate gesture. "The world!" he exclaimed--"the devil take the world! I've been out of it for five years, and well out of it. What do I care for the world!"

She drew herself up in a spirit of defence. "It isn't what you care for the world, but I had to live in it--alone, and because I was alone, eyebrows were lifted. It has been easy enough for you. You were where no one knew you. You had your freedom"--she advanced to the table, and, as though unconsciously, he did the same, and they gazed at each other over the white linen and its furnishings--"and no one was saying that your wife had left you for this or that, because of her bad conduct or of yours. Either way it was not what was fair and just; yet I had to bear and suffer, not you. There is no pain like it. There I was in misery and--"

A bitter smile came to his lips. "A woman can endure a good deal when she has all life's luxuries in her grasp. Did you ever think, Mona, that a man must suffer when he goes out into a world where he knows no one, penniless, with no trade, no profession, nothing except his own helpless self? He might have stayed behind among the luxuries that belonged to another, and eaten from the hand of his wife's charity, but"--(all the pride and pain of the old situation rose up in him, impelled by the brooding of the years of separation, heightened by the fact that he was no nearer to his goal of financial independence of her than he was when he left London five years before)--"but do you think, no matter what I've done, broken a pledge or not, been in the wrong a thousand times as much as I was, that I'd be fed by the hand of one to whom I had given a pledge and broken it? Do you think that I'd give her the chance to say, or not to say, but only think, 'I forgive you; I will give you your food and clothes and board and bed, but if you are not good in the future, I will be very, very angry with you'? Do you think--?"

His face was flaming now. The pent-up flood of remorse and resentment and pride and love--the love that tore itself in pieces because it had not the pride and self-respect which independence as to money gives--broke forth in him, fresh as he was from a brutal interview with the financial clique whom he had given the chance to make much money, and who were now, for a few thousand dollars, trying to cudgel him out of his one opportunity to regain his place in his lost world.

"I live--I live like this," he continued, with a gesture that embraced the room where they were, "and I have one room to myself where I have lived over four years"--he pointed towards it. "Do you think I would choose this and all it means--its poverty and its crudeness, its distance from all I ever had and all my people had, if I could have stood the other thing--a pauper taking pennies from his own wife? I had had taste enough of it while I had a little something left; but when I lost everything on Flamingo, and I was a beggar, I knew I could not stand the whole thing. I could not, would not, go under the poor-law and accept you, with the lash of a broken pledge in your hand, as my guardian. So that's why I left, and that's why I stay here, and that's why I'm going to stay here, Mona."

He looked at her firmly, though his face had that illumination which the spirit in his eyes--the Celtic fire drawn through the veins of his ancestors--gave to all he did and felt; and now as in a dream he saw little things in her he had never seen before. He saw that a little strand of her beautiful dark hair had broken away from its ordered place and hung prettily against the rosy, fevered skin of her cheek just beside her ear. He saw that there were no rings on her fingers save one, and that was her wedding-ring--and she had always been fond of wearing rings. He noted, involuntarily, that in her agitation the white tulle at her bosom had been disturbed into pretty disarray, and that there was neither brooch nor necklace at her breast or throat.

"If you stay, I am going to stay too," she declared in an almost passionate voice, and she spoke with deliberation and a look which left no way open to doubt. She was now a valiant little figure making a fight for happiness.

"I can't prevent that," he responded stubbornly.

She made a quick, appealing motion of her hands. "Would you prevent it? Aren't you glad to see me? Don't you love me any more? You used to love me. In spite of all, you used to love me. Even though you hated my money, and I hated your gambling--your betting on horses. You used to love me--I was sure you did then. Don't you love me now, Shiel?"

A gloomy look passed over his face. Memory of other days was admonishing him. "What is the good of one loving when the other doesn't? And, anyhow, I made up my mind five years ago that I would not live on my wife. I haven't done so, and I don't mean to 'do so. I don't mean to take a penny of your money. I should curse it to damnation if I was living on it. I'm not, and I don't mean to do so."

"Then I'll stay here and work too, without it," she urged, with a light in her eyes which they had never known.

He laughed mirthlessly. "What could you do--you never did a day's work in your life!"

"You could teach me how, Shiel."

His jaw jerked in a way it had when he was incredulous. "You used to say I was only--mark you, only a dreamer and a sportsman. Well, I'm no longer a dreamer and a sportsman; I'm a practical man. I've done with dreaming and sportsmanship. I can look at a situation as it is, and--"

"You are dreaming--but yes, you are dreaming still," she interjected. "And you are a sportsman still, but it is the sport of a dreamer, and a mad dreamer too. Shiel, in spite of all my faults in the past, I come to you, to stay with you, to live on what you earn if you like, if it's only a loaf of bread a day. I--I don't care about my money. I don't care about the luxuries which money can buy; I can do without them if I have you. Am I not to stay, and won't you--won't you kiss me, Shiel?"

She came close to him--came round the table till she stood within a few feet of him.

There was one trembling instant when he would have taken her hungrily into his arms, but as if some evil spirit interposed with malign purpose, there came the sound of feet on the gravel outside, and the figure of a man darkened the doorway. It was Augustus Burlingame, whose face as he saw Mona Crozier took on an ironical smile.

"Yes--what do you want?" inquired Crozier quietly. "A few words with Mr. Crozier on business, if he is not too much occupied?"

"What business?"

"I am acting for Messrs. Bradley, Willingden, Baxter, & Simmons."

The cloud darkened on Crozier's face. His lips tightened, his face hardened. "I will see you in a moment--wait outside, please," he added, as Burlingame made as though to step inside. "Wait at the gate," he added quietly, but with undisguised contempt.

The moment of moments for Mona and himself had passed. All the bitterness of defeat was on him again. All the humiliation of undeserved failure to accomplish what had been the dear desire of five years bore down his spirit now. Suddenly he had a suspicion that his wife had received information of his whereabouts from this very man, Burlingame. Had not the Young Doctor said that Burlingame had written to lawyers in the old land to get information concerning him? Was it not more than likely that he had given his wife the knowledge which had brought her here?

When Burlingame had disappeared he turned to Mona. "Who told you I was

here? Who wrote to you?" he asked darkly. The light had died away from his face. It was ascetic in its lonely gravity now.

"Your doctor cabled to Castlegarry and Miss Tynan wrote to me."

A faint flush spread over Crozier's face. "How did Miss Tynan know where to write?"

Mona had told the truth at once because she felt it was the only way. Now, however, she was in a position where she must either tell him that Kitty had opened that still sealed letter from herself to him which he had carried all these years, or else tell him an untruth. She had no right to tell him what Kitty had confided to her. There was no other way save to lie.

"How should I know? It was enough for me to get her letter," she replied.

"At Castlegarry?"

What was there to do? She must keep faith with Kitty, who had given her this sight of her husband again.

"Forwarded from Lammis," she said. "It reached me before the doctor's cable."

So it was Kitty--Kitty Tynan--who had brought his wife to this new home from which he had been trying so hard to get back to the old home. Kitty, the angel of the house.

"You wrote me a letter which drove me from home," he said heavily.

"No--no--no," she protested. "It was not that. I know it was not that. It was my money--it was that which drove you away. You have just said so."

"You wrote me a hateful letter," he persisted. "You didn't want to see me. You sent it to me by your sweet, young brother."

Her eyes flashed. "My letter did not drive you away. It couldn't have. You went because you did not love me. It was that and my money, not the letter, not the letter."

Somehow she had a curious feeling that the very letter which contained her bitter and hateful reproaches might save her yet. The fact that he had not opened it--well, she must see Kitty again. Her husband was in a dark mood. She must wait. She knew that her fortunate moment had passed when the rogue Burlingame appeared. She must wait for another.

"Shall I go now? You want to see that man outside. Shall I go, Shiel?" She was very pale, very quiet, steady and gentle.

"I must hear what that fellow has to say. It is business--important,"

he replied. "It may mean anything--everything, or nothing."

As she left the room he had an impulse to call her back, but he conquered it.

CHAPTER XVI

"'TWAS FOR YOUR PLEASURE YOU CAME HERE, YOU SHALL GO BACK FOR MINE"

For a moment Crozier stood looking at the closed doorway through which Mona had gone, with a look of repentant affection in his eyes; but as the thought of his own helpless insolvency and broken hopes flashed across his mind, a look of dark and harassed reflection shadowed his face. He turned to the front doorway with a savage gesture. The mutilated dignity of his manhood, the broken pride of a lifetime, the bitterness in his heart need not be held in check in dealing with the man who waited to give him a last thrust of enmity.

He left the house. Burlingame was seated on the stump of a tree which had been made into a seat. "Come to my room if you have business with me," Crozier said sharply.

As they went, Crozier swung aside from the front door towards the corner of the house.

"The back way?" asked Burlingame with a sneer.

"The old familiar way to you," was the smarting reply. "In any case, you are not welcome in Mrs. Tynan's part of the house. My room is my own, however, and I should prefer you within four walls while doing business with you."

Burlingame's face changed colour slightly, for the tone of Crozier's voice, the grimness of his manner, suggested an abnormal condition. Burlingame was not a brave man physically. He had never lived the outdoor life, though he had lived so much among outdoor people. He was that rare thing in a new land, a decadent, a connoisseur in vice, a lover of opiates and of liquor. He was young enough yet not to be incapacitated by it. His face and hands were white and a little flabby, and he wore his hair rather long, which, it is said, accounts for the weakness of some men, on the assumption that long hair wastes the strength. But Burlingame quickly remembered the attitude of the lady--Crozier's wife, he was certain--and of Crozier in the dining-room a few moments before, and to his suspicious eyes it was not characteristic of a happy family party. No doubt this grimness of Crozier was due to domestic trouble and not wholly to his own presence. Still, he felt softly for the tiny pistol he always carried in his big waistcoat pocket, and it comforted him.

Beyond the corner of the house Crozier paused and took a key from his

pocket. It opened a side door to his own room, seldom used, since it was always so pleasant in this happy home to go through the main living-room, which every one liked so much that, though it was not the dining-room, it was generally used as such, and though it was not the parlour, it was its frequent substitute. Opening the door, Crozier stepped aside to let Burlingame pass. It was two years since Burlingame had been in this room, and then he had entered it without invitation. His inquisitiveness had led him to explore it with no good intent when he lived in the house.

Entering now, he gave it quick scrutiny. It was clear he was looking for something in particular. He was, in fact, searching for signs of its occupancy by another than Shiel Crozier--tokens of a woman's presence. There was, however, no sign at all of that, though there were signs of a woman's care and attention in a number of little things--homelike, solicitous, perhaps affectionate care and attention. Certainly the spotless pillows, the pretty curtains, the pincushion, and charmingly valanced bed and shelves, cheap though the material was, showed a woman's very friendly care. When he lived in that house there were no such little attentions paid to him! It was his experience that where such attentions went something else went with them. A sensualist himself, it was not conceivable to him that men and women could be under the same roof without "passages of sympathetic friendship and tokens of affinity." That was a phrase he had frequently used when pursuing his own sort of happiness.

His swift scrutiny showed that Crozier's wife had no habitation here, and that gave him his cue for what the French call "the reconstruction of the crime." It certainly was clear that, as he had suggested at the Logan Trial, there was serious trouble in the Crozier family of two, and the offender must naturally be the man who had flown, not the woman who had stayed. Here was circumstantial evidence.

His suggestive glance, the look in his eyes, did not escape Crozier, who read it all aright; and a primitive expression of natural antipathy passed across his mediaeval face, making it almost inquisitorial.

"Will you care to sit?" he said, however, with the courtesy he could never avoid; and he pointed to a chair beside the little table in the centre of the room. As Burlingame sat down he noticed on the table a crumpled handkerchief. It had lettering in the corner. He spread it out slightly with his fingers, as though abstractedly thinking of what he was about to say. The initial in the corner was K. Kitty had left it on the table while she was talking to Mrs. Crozier a halfhour before. Whatever Burlingame actually thought or believed, he could not now resist picking up the handkerchief and looking at it with a mocking smile. It was too good a chance to waste. He still hugged to his evil heart the humiliating remembrance of his expulsion from this house, the share Crozier had had in it, and the things which Crozier had said to him then. He had his enemy now between the upper and the nether mill-stones, and he meant to grind him to the flour of utter abasement. It was clear that the arrival of Mrs. Crozier had brought him no relief, for Crozier's face was not that of a man who had found and opened a casket of good fortune.

"Rather dangerous that, in the bedroom of a family man," he said, picking up the handkerchief and looking suggestively from the lettering in the corner to Crozier. He laid it down again, smiling detestably.

Crozier calmly picked up the handkerchief, saw the lettering, then went quietly to the door of the room and called Mrs. Tynan's name. Presently she appeared. Crozier beckoned her into the room. When she entered, he closed the door behind her.

"Mrs. Tynan," he said, "this fellow found your daughter's handkerchief on my table, and he has said regarding it, 'Rather dangerous that, in the bedroom of a family man.' What would you like me to do with him?"

Mrs. Tynan walked up to Burlingame with the look of a woman of the Commune and said: "If I had a son I would disown him if he didn't mangle you till your wife would never know you again, you loathesome thing. There isn't a man or woman in Askatoon who'd believe your sickening slanders, for every one knows what you are. How dare you enter this house? If the men of Askatoon had any manhood in them they would tar-and-feather you. My girl is as good as any girl that ever lived, and you know it. Now go out of here--now!"

Crozier intervened quietly. "Mrs. Tynan, I asked him in here because it is my room. I have some business with him. When it is over, then he shall go, and we will fumigate the place. As for the tar-and-feathers, you might leave that to me. I think I can arrange it.

"I'll turn the hose on him as he goes out, if you don't mind," the irate mother exclaimed as she left the room.

Crozier nodded. "Well, that would be appropriate, Mrs. Tynan, but it wouldn't cleanse him. He is the original leopard whose spots are there for ever."

By this time Burlingame was on his feet, and a look of craft and fear and ugly meaning was in his face. Morally he was a coward, physically he was a coward, but he had in his pocket a weapon which gave him a feeling of superiority in the situation; and after a night of extreme self-indulgence he was in a state of irritation of the nerves which gave him what the searchers after excuses for ungoverned instincts and acts call "brain-storms." He had had sense enough to know that his amorous escapades would get him into trouble one day, and he had always carried the little pistol which was now so convenient to his hand. It gave him a fictitious courage which he would not have had unarmed against almost any man--or woman--in Askatoon.

"You get a woman to do your fighting for you," he said hatefully. "You have to drag her in. It was you I meant to challenge, not the poor girl young enough to be your daughter." His hand went to his waistcoat pocket. Crozier saw and understood.

Suddenly Crozier's eyes blazed. The abnormal in him--the Celtic strain always at variance with the normal, an almost ultra-natural attendant of

it awoke like a tempest in the tropics. His face became transformed, alive with a passion uncanny in its recklessness and purpose. It was a brain-storm indeed, but it had behind it a normal power, a moral force which was not to be resisted.

"None of your sickly melodrama here. Take out of your pocket the pistol you carry and give it to me," Crozier growled. "You are not to be trusted. The habit of thinking you would shoot somebody some time-- somebody you had injured--might become too much for you to-day, and then I should have to kill you, and for your wife's sake I don't want to do that. I always feel sorry for a woman with a husband like you. You could never shoot me. You couldn't be quick enough, but you might try. Then I should end you, and there'd be another trial; but the lawyer who defended me would not have to cross-examine any witness about your character. It is too well-known, Burlingame. Out with it--the pistol!" he added, standing menacingly over the other.

In a kind of stupor, under the storm that was breaking above him, Burlingame slowly drew out of a capacious waistcoat pocket a tiny but powerful pistol of the most modern make.

"Put it in my hand," insisted Crozier, his eyes on the other's.

The flabby hand laid the weapon in Crozier's lean and strenuous fingers. Crozier calmly withdrew the cartridges and then tossed the weapon back on the table.

"Now we have equality of opportunity," he remarked quietly. "If you think you would like to repeat any slander that's slid off your foul tongue, do it now; and in a moment or two Mrs. Tynan can turn the hose on the floor of this room."

"I want to get to business," said Burlingame sullenly, as he took from his pocket a paper.

Crozier nodded. "I can imagine your haste," he remarked. "You need all the fees you can get to pay Belle Bingley's bills."

Burlingame did not wince. He made no reply to the challenge that he was the chief supporter of a certain wanton thereabouts.

"The time for your option to take ten thousand dollars' worth of shares in the syndicate is up," he said; "and I am instructed to inform you that Messrs. Bradley, Willingden, Baxter, & Simmons propose to take over your unpaid shares and to complete the transaction without you."

"Who informed Messrs. Bradley, Willingden, Baxter, & Simmons that I am not prepared to pay for my shares?" asked Crozier sharply.

"The time is up," surlily replied Burlingame. "It is assumed you can't take up your shares, and that you don't want to do so. The time is up," he added emphatically, and he tapped the paper spread before him on the table.

Crozier's eyes half closed in an access of stubbornness and hatred. "You are not to assume anything whatever," he declared. "You are to accommodate yourself to actual facts. The time is not up. It is not up till midnight, and any action taken before then on any other assumption will give grounds for damages."

Crozier spoke without passion and with a coldblooded insistence not lost on Burlingame. Taking down a calendar from the wall, he laid it beside the paper on the table before the too eager lawyer. "Examine the dates," he said. "At twelve o'clock tonight Messrs. Bradley, Willingden, Baxter, & Simmons are free to act, if the money is not at the disposal of the syndicate by then; but till then my option is indefeasible. Does that meet the case or not?"

"It meets the case," said Burlingame in a morose voice, rising. "If you can produce the money before the stroke of midnight, why can't you produce it now? What's the use of bluffing! It can't do any good in the end. Your credit--"

"My credit has been stopped by your friends," interrupted Crozier, "but my resources are current." "Midnight is not far off," viciously remarked Burlingame as he made for the door.

Crozier intercepted him. "One word with you on another business before you go," he said. "The tar-and-feathers for which Mrs. Tynan asks will be yours at any moment I raise my hand in Askatoon. There are enough women alone who would do it."

"Talk of that after midnight," sneered Burlingame desperately as the door was opened for him by Crozier. "Better not go out by the front gate," remarked Crozier scornfully. "Mrs. Tynan is a woman of her word, and the hose is handy."

A moment later, with contemptuous satisfaction, he saw Burlingame climb the picket-fence at the side of the house.

Turning back into the room, he threw up his arms. "Midnight--midnight--my God, where am I to get the money! I must--I must have it . . . It's the only way back."

Sitting down at the table, he dropped his head into his hands and shut his eyes in utter dejection. "Mona--by Heaven, no, I'll never take it from her!" he said once, and clenched his hands at his temples and sat on and on unmoving.

CHAPTER XVII

WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT IT?

For a full half-hour Crozier sat buried in dark reflection, then he slowly raised his head, and for a minute looked round dazedly. His absorption had been so great that for a moment he was like one who had awakened upon unfamiliar things. As when in a dream of the night the history of years will flash past like a ray of light, so for the bad half-hour in which Crozier had given himself up to despair, his mind had travelled through an incongruous series of incidents of his past life, and had also revealed pictures of solution after solution of his present troubles.

He had that-gift of visualization which makes life an endless procession of pictures which allure, or which wear the nature into premature old age. The last picture flashing before his eyes, as he sat there alone, was of himself and his elder brother, Garnett, now master of Castlegarry, racing ponies to reach the lodge-gates before they closed for the night, after a day of disobedience and truancy. He remembered how Garnett had given him the better pony of the two, so that the younger brother, who would be more heavily punished if they were locked out, should have the better chance. Garnett, if odd in manner and character, had always been a true sportsman though not a lover of sport.

If--if--why had he never thought of Garnett? Garnett could help him, and he would do so. He would let Garnett stand in with him--take one-third of his profits from the syndicate. Yes, he must ask Garnett to see him through. Then it was that he lifted his head from his hands, and his mind awakened out of a dream as real as though he had actually been asleep. Garnett--alas! Garnett was thousands of miles away, and he had not heard from him for five years. Still, he knew the master of Castlegarry was alive, for he had seen him mentioned in a chance number of *The Morning Post* lately come to his hands. What avail! Garnett was at Castlegarry, and at midnight his chance of fortune and a new life would be gone. Then, penniless, he would have to face Mona again; and what would come of that he could not see, would not try to see. There was an alternative he would not attempt to face until after midnight, when this crisis in his life would be over. Beyond midnight was a darkness which he would not now try to pierce. As his eyes again became used to his surroundings, a look of determination, the determination of the true gambler, came into his face. The real gambler never throws up the sponge till all is gone; never gives up till after the last toss of the last penny of cash or credit; for he has seen such innumerable times the thing come right and good fortune extend a friendly hand with the last hazard of all.

Suddenly he remembered--saw--a scene in the gambling rooms at Monte Carlo on the only visit he had ever paid to the place. He had played constantly, and had won more or less each day. Then his fortune turned and he lost and lost each day. At last, one evening, he walked up to a table and said to the croupier, "When was zero up last?" The croupier answered, "Not for an hour." Forthwith he began to stake on zero and on nothing else. For two hours he put his louis at each turn of the wheel on the Lonely Nought. For two hours he lost. Increasing his stake, which had begun at five francs and had risen at length to five louis, he still coaxed the sardonic deity. Finally midnight came, and he was the

only person playing at the table. All others had gone or had ceased to play. These stayed to watch the "mad Inglesi," as a foreigner called him, knocking his head against the foot stool of an unresponsive god of chance. The croupiers watched also with somewhat disdainful, somewhat pitying interest, this last representative of a class who have an insane notion that the law of chances is in their favour if they can but stay the course. And how often had they seen the stubborn challenger of a black demon, who would not appear according to the law of chances, leave the table ruined for ever!

Smiling, Crozier had played on till he had but ten louis left. Counting them over with cheerful exactness, he rose up, lit a cigarette, placed the ten louis on the fatal spot with cynical precision, and with a gay smile kissed his hand to the refractory Nothing and said, "You've got it all, Zero-good-night! Goodnight, Zero!" Then he had buttoned his coat and turned away to seek the cool air of the Mediterranean. He had gone but a step or two, his head half gaily turned to the table where the dwindling onlookers stood watching the wheel spin round, when suddenly the croupier's cry of "Zero!" fell upon his ears.

With cheerful nonchalance he had come back to the table and picked up the many louis he had won--won by his last throw and with his last available coin.

As the scene passed before him now he got to his feet and, with that look of the visionary in his eyes, which those only know who have watched the born gamester, said, "I'll back my hand till the last throw." Then it was, as his eyes gazed in front of him dreamily, he saw the card on his mirror bearing the words, "Courage, soldier!"

With a deepening flame in his eyes he went over and gazed at it. At length he reached out and touched the writing with a caressing finger.

"Kitty--Kitty, how great you are!" he said. Then as he turned to the outer door a softness came into his face, stole up into his brilliant eyes and dimmed them with a tear. "What a hand to hold in the dark--the dark of life !" he said aloud. "Courage, soldier!" he added, as he opened the door by which he had entered, through which Burlingame had gone, and strode away towards the town of Askatoon, feeling somehow in his heart that before midnight his luck would turn.

From the dining-room Kitty had watched him go. "Courage, soldier!" she whispered after him, and she laughed; but almost immediately she threw her head up with a gasping sigh, and when it was lowered again two tears were stealing down her cheeks.

With an effort she conquered herself, wiped away the tears, and said aloud, with a whimsical but none the less pitiful self-reproach, "Kitty-Kitty Tynan, what a fool you are!"

Entering the room Crozier had left, she went to the desk with the green-baize top, opened it, and took out the fateful letter which Mona Crozier had written to her husband five years ago. Putting it into her pocket

she returned to the dining-room. She stood there for a moment with her chin in her hands and deep reflection in her eyes, and then, going to the door of her mother's sitting-room, she opened it and beckoned. A moment later Mrs. Crozier and the Young Doctor entered the dining-room and sat down at a motion from her. Presently she said:

"Mrs. Crozier, I have here the letter your husband received from you five years ago in London."

Mrs. Crozier flushed. She had been masterful by nature and she had had her way very much in life. To be dominated in the most intimate things of her life by this girl was not easy to be borne; but she realised that Kitty had been a friend indeed, even if not conventional. In response to Kitty's remark now she inclined her head.

"Well, you have told us that you and your husband haven't made it up. That is so, isn't it?" Kitty continued.

"If you wish to put it that way," answered Mona, stiffening a little in spite of herself.

"P'r'aps I don't put it very well, but it is the stony fact, isn't it, Mrs. Crozier?"

Mona hesitated a moment, then answered: "He is very upset concerning the land syndicate, and he has a quixotic idea that he cannot take money from me to help him carry it through."

"I don't quite know what quixotic means," rejoined Kitty dryly. "If it wasn't understood while you lived together that what was one's was the other's, that it was all in one purse, and that you shut your eyes to the name on the purse and took as you wanted, I don't see how you could expect him, after your five years' desertion, to take money from you now."

"My five years' desertion!" exclaimed Mona. Surely this girl was more than reckless in her talk. Kitty was not to be put down. "If you don't mind plain speaking, he was always with you, but you weren't always with him in those days. This letter showed that." She tapped it on her thumb-nail. "It was only when he had gone and you saw what you had lost, that you came back to him--in heart, I mean. Well, if you didn't go away with him when he went, and you wouldn't have gone unless he had ordered you to go--and he wouldn't do that--it's clear you deserted him, since you did that which drove him from home, and you stayed there instead of going with him. I've worked it out, and it is certain you deserted him five years ago. Desertion doesn't mean a sea of water between, it means an ocean of self-will and love-me-first between. If you hadn't deserted him, as this letter shows, he wouldn't have been here. I expect he told you so; and if he did, what did you say to him?"

The Young Doctor's eyes were full of decorous mirth and apprehension, for such logic and such impudence as Kitty's was like none he had ever heard. Yet it was commanding too.

Kitty caught the look in his eyes and blazed up. "Isn't what I said correct? Isn't it all true and logical? And if it is, why do you sit there looking so superior?"

The Young Doctor made a gesture of deprecating apology. "It's all true, and it's logical, too, if you stand on your head when you think it. But whether it is logical or not, it is your conclusion, and as you've taken the thing in hand to set it right, it is up to you now. We can only hold hard and wait."

With a shrug of her graceful shoulders Kitty turned again to Mrs. Crozier, who intervened hastily, saying, "I did not have a chance of saying to him all I wished. Of course he could not take my money, but there was his own money! I was going to tell him about that, but just then the lawyer, Mr. Burlingame--"

"They all call him 'Gus' Burlingame. He doesn't get the civility of Mr. here in Askatoon," interposed Kitty.

Mona made an impatient gesture. "If you will listen, I want to tell you about Mr. Crozier's money. He thinks he has no money, but he has. He has a good deal."

She paused, and the Young Doctor and Kitty leaned forward eagerly. "Well, but go on," said Kitty. "If he has money he must have it to-day, and now. Certainly he doesn't know of it. He thinks he is broke,--dead broke,--and there'd be a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for him if he could put up ten thousand dollars to-night. If I were you I wouldn't hide it from him any longer."

Mona got to her feet in anger. "If you would give me a chance to explain, I would do so," she said, her lips trembling. "Unfortunately, I am in your hands, but please give me credit for some intelligence--and some heart. In any case I shall not be bullied."

The Young Doctor almost laughed outright, despite the danger of the situation. He was not prepared for Kitty's reply and the impulsive act that marched with it. In an instant Kitty had caught Mona Crozier's hand and pressed it warmly. "I was only doing what I've seen lawyers do," she said eagerly. "I've got something that I want you to do, and I've been trying to work up to it. That's all. I'm not as mean and bad mannered as you think me. I really do care what happens to him--to you both," she hastened to add.

Struggling to keep back her tears, and in a low voice, Mona rejoined: "I meant to have told him what I'm going to tell you now. I couldn't say anything about the money belonging to him till I had told him how it came to be his."

After a moment's pause she continued: "He told you all about the race which Flamingo lost, and about that letter." She pointed to the letter which Kitty still carried in her hand. "Well, that letter was written

under the sting of bitter disappointment. I was vain. I was young. I did not understand as I do now. If you were not such good friends-- of his--I could not tell you this. It seemed to me that by breaking his pledge he showed he did not care for me; that he thought he could break a sacred pledge to me, and it didn't matter. I thought it was treating me lightly--to do it so soon after the pledge was given. I was indignant. I felt we weren't as we might be, and I felt, too, that I must be at fault; but I was so proud that I didn't want to admit it, I suppose, when he did give me a grievance. It was all so mixed. I was shocked at his breaking his pledge, I was so vexed that our marriage hadn't been the success it might have been, and I think I was a little mad."

"That is not the monopoly of only one of your sex," interposed the Young Doctor dryly. "If I were you I wouldn't apologise for it. You speak to a sister in like distress."

Kitty's eyes flamed up, but she turned her head, as though some licensed libertine of speech had had his say, and looked with friendly eyes at Mona. "Yes, yes--please go on," she urged.

"When I wrote that letter I had forgotten what I had done the day before the race. I had gone into my husband's room to find some things I needed from the drawer of his dressing-table; and far at the back of a drawer I found a crumpled-up roll of ten-pound notes. It was fifty pounds altogether. I took the notes--"

She paused a moment, and the room became very still. Both her listeners were sure that they were nearing a thing of deep importance.

In a lower voice Mona continued: "I don't know what possessed me, but perhaps it was that the things he did of which I disapproved most had got a hold on me in spite of myself. I said to myself: 'I am going to the Derby. I will take the fifty pounds, and I'll put it on a horse for Shiel.' He had talked so much to my brother about Flamingo, and I had seen him go wrong so often, that I had a feeling if I put it on a horse that Shiel particularly banned, it would probably win. He had been wrong nearly every time for two years. It was his money, and if it won, it would make him happy; and if it didn't win, well, he didn't know the money existed--I was sure of that; and, anyhow, I could replace it. I put it on a horse he condemned utterly, but of which one or two people spoke well. You know what happened to Flamingo. While at Epsom I heard from friends that Shiel was present at the race, though he had said he would not go. Later I learned that he had lost heavily. Then I saw him in the distance paying out money and giving bills to the bookmakers. It made me very angry. I don't think I was quite sane. Most women are like that at times."

"As I said," remarked the Young Doctor, his face mirthfully alive. Here was a situation indeed.

"So I wrote him that letter," Mona went on. "I had forgotten all about the money I put on the outsider which won the race. As you know, I was called away to my sick sister that evening, and the money I won with

Shiel's fifty pounds was not paid to me till after Shiel had gone."

"How much was it?" asked Kitty breathlessly.

"Four thousand pounds."

Kitty exclaimed so loudly that she smothered her mouth with a hand.

"Why, he only needs for the syndicate two thousand pounds--ten thousand dollars," she said excitedly. "But what's the good of it, if he can't lay his hand on it by midnight to-night!"

"He can do so," was Mona's quick reply. "I was going to tell him that, but the lawyer came, and--"

Kitty sprang up and down in excitement. "I had a plan. It might have worked without this. It was the only way then. But this makes it sure --yes, most beautifully sure. It shows that the thing to do is to follow your convictions. You say you actually have the money, Mrs. Crozier?"

Mona took from her pocket an envelope, and out of it she drew four Bank of England notes. "Here it is--here are four one-thousand-pound notes. I had it paid to me that way five years ago, and here--here it is," she added, with almost a touch of hysteria in her voice, for the excitement of it all acted on her like an electric storm.

"Well, we'll get to work at once," declared Kitty, looking at the notes admiringly, then taking them from Mona and smoothing them out with tender firmness. "It's just the luck of the wide world, as my father used to say. It actually is. Now you see," she continued, "it's like this. That letter you wrote him"--she addressed herself to Mona--"it has to be changed. You have got to rewrite it, and you must put into it these four bank-notes. Then when you see him again you must have that letter opened at exactly the right moment, and--oh, I wonder if you will do it exactly right!" she added dubiously to Mona. "You don't play your game very well, and it's just possible that, even now, with all the cards in your hands, you will throw them away as you did in the past. I wish that--"

Seeing Mona's agitation changing to choler, the Young Doctor intervened. He did not know Kitty was purposely stinging Crozier's unhappy little consort, so that she should be put upon her mettle to do the thing without bungling.

"You can trust Mrs. Crozier to act carefully; but what exactly do you mean? I judge that Mrs. Crozier does not see more distinctly than I do," he remarked inquiringly to Kitty, and with admonishment in tone and emphasis.

"No, I do not understand quite--will you explain?" interposed Mona with inner resentment at being managed, but feeling that she could not do without Kitty even if she would.

"As I said," continued Kitty, "I will open that letter, and you will put in another letter and these bank-notes; and when he repeats what he said

about the way you felt and wrote when he broke his pledge, you can blaze up and tell him to open the letter. Then he will be so sorry that he'll get down on his knees, and you will be happy ever after."

"But it will be a fraud, and dishonest and dishonourable," protested Mona.

Kitty almost sniffed, but she was too agitated to be scornful. "Just leave that to me, please. It won't make me a bit more dishonourable to open the letter again--I've opened it once, and I don't feel any the worse for it. I have no conscience, and things don't weigh on my mind at all. I'm a light-minded person."

Looking closely at her, the Young Doctor got a still further insight into the mind and soul of this prairie girl, who used a lid of irony to cover a well of deep feeling. Things did not weigh on her mind! He was sure that pain to the wife of Shiel Crozier would be mortal torture to Kitty Tynan.

"But I felt exactly what I wrote that Derby Day when he broke his pledge, and he ought to know me exactly as I was," urged Mona. "I don't want to deceive him, to appear a bit better than I am."

"Oh, you'd rather lose him!" said Kitty almost savagely. "Knowing how hard it is to keep a man under the best circumstances, you'd willingly make the circumstances as bad as they can be--is that it? Besides, weren't you sorry afterwards that you wrote that letter?"

"Yes, yes, desperately sorry."

"And you wished often that your real self had written on Derby Day and not the scratch-cat you were then?"

Mona flushed, but answered bravely, "Yes, a thousand times."

"What business had you to show him your cat-self, your unreal, not your real self on Derby Day five years ago? Wasn't it your duty to show him your real self?"

Mona nodded helplessly. "Yes, I know it was."

"Then isn't it your duty to see that your real self speaks in that letter now?"

"I want him to know me exactly as I am, and then--"

Kitty made a passionate gesture. Was ever such an uncomprehending woman as this diamond-button of a wife?

"And then you would be unhappy ever after instead of being happy ever after. What is the good of prejudicing your husband against you by telling the unnecessary truth. He is desperate, and besides, he has been away from you for five years, and we all change somehow--particularly

men, when there are so many women in the world, and very pretty women of all ages and kinds and colours and tastes, and dazzling, deceitful hussies too. It isn't wise for any woman to let her husband or any one at all see her exactly as she is; and only the silly ones do it. They tell what they think is the truth about their own wickedness, and it isn't the truth at all, because I suppose women don't know how to tell the exact truth; and they can be just as unfair to themselves as they are to others. Besides, haven't you any sense of humour, Mrs. Crozier? It's as good as a play, this. Just think: after five years of desertion, and trouble without end, and it all put right by a little sleight-of-hand. Shall I open it?"

She held the letter up. Mona nodded almost eagerly now, for come of a subtle, social world far away, she still was no match for the subtlety of the wilds--or was it the cunning the wild things know?

Kitty left the room, but in a moment afterwards returned with the letter open. "The kettle on the hob is the friend of the family," she said gaily. "Here it is all ready for what there is to do. You go and keep watch for Mr. Crozier," she added to the Young Doctor. "He won't be gone long, I should think, and we don't want him bursting in on us before I've got that letter safe back into his desk. If he comes, you keep him busy for a moment. When we're quite ready I'll come to the front door, and then you will know it is all right."

"I'm to go while you make up your prescription--all right!" said the Young Doctor, and with a wave of the hand he left the room.

Instantly Kitty brought a lead pencil and paper. "Now sit down and write to him, Mrs. Crozier," she said briskly. "Use discretion; don't gush; slap his face a little for breaking his pledge, and afterwards tell him that you did at the Derby what you had abused him for doing. Then explain to him about this four thousand pounds--twenty thousand dollars --my, what a lot of money, and all got in one day! Tell him that it was all won by his own cash. It's as easy as can be, and it will be a certainty now."

So saying, she lit a match. "You--hold this wicked old catfish letter into the flame, please, Mrs. Crozier, and keep praying all the time, and please remember that 'our little hands were never made to tear each other's eyes.'"

Mona's small fingers were trembling as she held the fateful letter into the flame, and then in silence both watched it burn to a cinder. A faint, hopeful smile was on Mona's face now.

"What isn't never was to those that never knew," said Kitty briskly, and pushed a chair up to the table. "Now sit down and write, please."

Mona sat down. Taking up a sheet of notepaper she looked at it dubiously.

"Oh, what a fool I am!" said Kitty, understanding the look. "And that's

what every criminal does--he forgets something. I forgot the notepaper. Of course you can't use that notepaper. Of course not. He'd know it in a minute. Besides, the sheet we burned had an engraved address on it. I never thought of that--good gracious!"

"Wait--wait," said Mona, her face lighting. "I may have some sheets in my writing-case. It's only a chance, but there were some loose sheets in it when I left home. I'll go and see."

While she was gone to her bedroom Kitty stood still in the middle of the room lost in reflection, as completely absorbed as though she was seeing things thousands of miles away. In truth, she was seeing things millions of miles away; she was seeing a Promised Land. It was a gift of hers, or a penalty of her life, perhaps, that she could lose herself in reverie at a moment's notice--a reverie as complete as though she was subtracted from life's realities. Now, as she looked out of the door, far over the prairie to a tiny group of pine-trees in the vanishing distance, lines she once read floated through her mind:

"Away and beyond the point of pines,
In a pleasant land where the glad grapes be,
Purple and pendent on verdant vines,
I know that my fate is awaiting me."

What fate was to be hers? There was no joy in her eyes as she gazed. Mrs. Crozier was beside the table again before she roused herself from her trance.

"I've got it--just two sheets, two solitary sheets," said Mona in triumph. "How long they have been in my case I don't know. It is almost uncanny they should be there just when they're most needed."

"Providential, we should say out here," was Kitty's response. "Begin, please. Be sure you have the right date. It was--"

Mona had already written the date, and she interrupted Kitty with the words, "As though I could forget it!" All at once Kitty put a restraining hand on her arm.

"Wait--wait, you mustn't write on that paper yet. Suppose you didn't write the real wise thing--and only two sheets of paper and so much to say?"

"How right you always are!" said Mona, and took up one of the blank sheets which Kitty had just brought her.

Then she began to write. For a minute she wrote swiftly, nervously, and had nearly finished a page when Kitty said to her, "I think I had better see what you have written. I don't think you are the best judge. You see, I have known him better than you for the last five years, and I am the best judge please, I mean it in the rightest, kindest way," she added, as she saw Mona shrink. It was like hurting a child, and she loved children--so much. She had always a vision of children at her

knee.

Silently Mrs. Crozier pushed the sheets towards her. Kitty read the page with a strange, eager look in her eyes. "Yes, that's right as far as it goes," she said. "It doesn't gush. It's natural. It's you as you are now, not as you were then, of course."

Again Mona bent over the paper and wrote till she had completed a page. Then Kitty looked over her shoulder and read what had been written. "No, no, no, that won't do," she exclaimed. "That won't do at all. It isn't in the way that will accomplish what we want. You've gone quite, quite wrong. I'll do it. I'll dictate it to you. I know exactly what to say, and we mustn't make any mistake. Write, please--you must."

Mona scratched out what had been written without a word. "I am waiting," she said submissively.

"All right. Now we go on. Write. I'll dictate." "And look here, dearest," she began, but Mona stopped her.

"We do not say 'look here' in England. I would have said 'and see.'"

"And see-dearest," corrected Kitty, with an accent on the last word, "while I was mad at you for the moment for breaking your promise--"

"In England we don't say 'mad' in that connection," Mona again interrupted. "We say 'angry' or 'annoyed' or 'vexed.'" There was real distress in her tone.

"Now I'll tell you what to do," said Kitty cheerfully. "I'll speak it, and you write it my way of thinking, and then when we've finished you will take out of the letter any words that are not pure, noble, classic English. I know what you mean, and you are quite right. Mr. Crozier never says 'look here' or 'mad,' and he speaks better than any one I ever heard. Now, we certainly must get on."

After an instant she began again.

"--While I was angry at you a moment for breaking your promise, I cannot reproach you for it, because I, too, bet on the Derby, but I bet on a horse that you had said as much against as you could. I did it because you had very bad luck all this year and lost, and also last year, and I thought--"

For several minutes, with greater deliberation than was usual with her, Kitty dictated, and at the end of the letter she said, "I am, dearest, your--"

Here Mona sharply interrupted her. "If you don't mind I will say that myself in my own way," she said, flushing.

"Oh, I forgot for the moment that I was speaking for you!" responded Kitty, with a lurking, undermeaning in her voice. "I threw myself into

it so. Do you think I've done the thing right?" she added.

With a direct, honest friendliness Mona looked into Kitty eyes. "You have said the exact right thing as to meaning, I am sure, and I can change an occasional word here and there to make it all conventional English."

Kitty nodded. "Don't lose a minute in copying it. We must get the letter back in his desk as soon as possible."

As Mona wrote, Kitty sat with the envelope in her hand, alternately looking at it and into the distance beyond the point of pines. She was certain that she had found the solution of the troubles of Shiel and Mona Crozier, for Crozier would now have his fortune, and the return to his wife was a matter of course. Was she altogether sure? But yes, she was altogether sure. She remembered, with a sudden, swift plunge of blood in her veins, that early dawn when she bent over him as he lay beneath the tree, and as she kissed him in his sleep he had murmured, "My darling!" That had not been for her, though it had been her kiss which had stirred his dreaming soul to say the words. If they had only been meant for her, then--oh, then life would be so much easier in the future! If--if she could only kiss him again and he would wake and say--

She got to her feet with an involuntary exclamation. For an instant she had been lost in a world of her own, a world of the impossible.

"I almost thought I heard a step in the other room," she said in explanation to Mona. Going to the door of Crozier's room, she appeared to listen for a moment, and then she opened it.

"No, it is all right," she said.

In another few minutes Mona had finished the letter. "Do you wish to read it again?" she asked Kitty, but not handing it to her.

"No, I leave the words to you. It was the right meaning I wanted in it," she replied.

Suddenly Mona came to her and laid a hand on her arm. "You are wonderful--a wonderful, wise, beloved girl," she said, and there were tears in her eyes.

Kitty gave the tiny fingers a spasmodic clasp, and said: "Quick, we must get them in!" She put the banknotes inside the sheets of paper, then hastily placed both in the envelope and sealed the envelope again.

"It's just a tiny bit damp with the steam yet, but it will be all right in five minutes. How soiled the envelope is!" Kitty added. "Five years in and out of the desk, in and out of his pocket--but all so nice and unsoiled and sweet and bonny inside," she added. "To say nothing of the bawbees, as Mr. Crozier calls money. Well, we are ready. It all depends on you now, Mrs. Crozier."

"No, not all."

"He used to be afraid of you; now you are afraid of him," said Kitty, as though stating a commonplace.

There was no more shrewishness left in the little woman to meet this chastisement. The forces against her were too many. Loneliness and the long struggle to face the world without her man; the determination of this masterful young woman who had been so long a part of her husband's life; and, more than all, a new feeling altogether--love, and the dependence a woman feels, the longing to find rest in strong arms, which comes with the first revelation of love, had conquered what Kitty had called her "bossiness." She was now tremulous before the crisis which she must presently face. Pride in her fortune, in her independence, had died down in her. She no longer thought of herself as a woman especially endowed and privileged. She took her fortune now like a man; for she had been taught that a man could set her aside just because she had money, could desert her to be independent of it. It had been a revelation to her, and she was chastened of all the termagancy visible and invisible in her. She stood now before Kitty of "a humble and a contrite heart," and made no reply at all to the implied challenge. Kitty, instantly sorry for what she had said, let it go at that. She was only now aware of how deeply her arrows had gone home.

As they stood silent there was a click at the gate. Kitty ran into Crozier's room, thrust the letter into its pigeonhole in the desk, and in a moment was back again. In the garden the Young Doctor was holding Crozier in conversation, but watching the front door. So soon, however, as Kitty had shown herself, as she had promised, at the front door and then vanished, he turned Crozier towards the house again by an adroit word, and left him at the door-step.

Seeing who was inside the room Crozier hesitated, and his long face, with paleness added to its asceticism, took on a look which could have given no hope of happiness to Mona. It went to her heart as no look of his had ever gone. Suddenly she had a revelation of how little she had known of what he was, or what any man was or could be, or of those springs of nature lying far below the outer lives which move in orbits of sheltering convention. It is because some men and women are so sheltered from the storms of life by wealth and comfort that these piercing agonies which strike down to the uttermost depths so seldom reach them.

Shiel half turned away, not sullen, not morose, but with a strange apathy settled on him. He had once heard a man say, "I feel as though I wanted to crawl into a hole and die." That was the way he felt now, for to be beaten in the game which you have played like a man yourself and have been fouled into an unchallenged defeat, without the voice of the umpire, is a fate which has smothered the soul of better men than Crozier.

Mona's voice stopped him. "Do not go, Shiel," she urged gently. "No, you must not go--I want fair-play from you, if nothing else. You must play the game with me. I want justice. I have to say some things I had no chance to say before, and I want to hear some things I have a right to

hear. Indeed, you must play the game."

He drew himself up. Not to be a sportsman, not to play the game--to accuse him of this would have brought him back from the edge of the grave.

"I'm not fit to-day. Let it be to-morrow, Mona," was his hesitating reply; but he did not leave the doorway.

She shook her head and made a swift little childlike gesture towards him. "We are sure of to-day; we are not sure of to-morrow. One or the other of us might not be here to-morrow. Let us do to-day the thing that belongs to to-day."

That note struck home, for indeed the black spirit which whispers to men in their most despairing hours to end it all had whispered to him.

"Let us do to-day the thing that belongs to to-day," she had just said, and, strange to say, there shot into his mind words that belonged to the days when he went to church at Castlegarry and thought of a thousand things other than prayer or praise, but yet heard with the acute ears of the young, and remembered with the persistent memory of youth. "For the night cometh when no man can work," were the words which came to him. He shuddered slightly. Suppose that this indeed was the beginning of the night! As she said, he must play the game--play it as Crozier of Lammis would have played it.

He stepped inside the room. "Let it be to-day," he said.

"We may be interrupted here," she replied. Courage came to her. "Let us talk in your own room," she added, and going over she opened the door of it and walked in. The matured modesty of a lost five years did not cloak her actions now. She was a woman fighting for happiness, and she had been so beaten by the rods of scorn, so smothered by the dust of humiliation, that there had come to her the courage of those who would rather die fighting than in the lethargy of despair.

It was like her old self to take the initiative, but she did it now in so different a way--without masterfulness or assumption. It was rather like saying, "I will do what I know you wish me to do; I will lay all reserve aside for your sake; I will be bold because I love you."

He shut the door behind them and motioned her to a chair.

"No, I will not sit," she said. "That is too formal. You ask any stranger to sit. I am at home here, Shiel, and I will stand."

"What was it you wanted to say, Mona?" he asked, scarcely looking at her.

"I should like to think that there was something you wished to hear," she replied. "Don't you want to know all that has happened since you left us--about me, about your brother, about your friends, about Lammis? I

bought Lammis at the sale you ordered; it is still ours." She gave emphasis to "ours." "You may not want to hear all that has happened to me since you left, still I must tell you some things that you ought to know, if we are going to part again. You treated me badly. There was no reason why you should have left and placed me in the position you did."

His head came up sharply and his voice became a little hard. "I told you I was penniless, and I would not live on you, and I could do nothing in England; I had no trade or profession. If I had said good-bye to you, you would probably have offered me a ticket to Canada. As I was a pauper I preferred to go with what I had out of the wreck--just enough to bring me here. But I've earned my own living since."

"Penniless--just enough to bring you out here!" Her voice had a sound of honest amazement. "How can you say such a thing! You had my letter--you said you had my letter?"

"Yes, I had your letter," he answered. "Your thoughtful brother brought it to me. You had told him all the dear womanly things you had said or were going to say to your husband, and he passed them on to me with the letter."

"Never mind what he said to you, Shiel. It was what I said that mattered." She was getting bolder every minute. The comedy was playing into her hands.

"You wrote in your letter the things he said to me," he replied.

Her protest sounded indignantly real. "I said nothing in the letter I wrote you that any man would not wish to hear. Is it so unpleasant for a man who thinks he is penniless to be told that he has made the year's income of a cabinet minister?"

"I don't understand," he returned helplessly.

"You talk as though you had never read my letter.

"I never have read your letter," he replied in bewilderment.

Her face had the flush of honest anger. "You do not dare to tell me you destroyed my letter without reading it--that you destroyed all that letter contained simply because you no longer cared for your wife; because you wanted to be rid of her, wanted to vanish and never see her any more, and so go and leave no trace of yourself! You have the courage here to my face"--the comedy of the situation gained much from the mock indignation--she no longer had any compunctions--"to say that you destroyed my letter and what it contained--a small fortune it would be out here."

"I did not destroy your letter, Mona," was the embarrassed response.

"Then what did you do with it? Gave it to some one else to read--to some other woman, perhaps."

He was really shocked and greatly pained. "Hush! You shall not say that kind of thing, Mona. I've never had anything to do with any woman but my wife since I married her."

"Then what did you do with the letter?"

"It's there," he said, pointing to the high desk with the green baize top.

"And you say you have never read it?"

"Never."

She raised her head with dainty haughtiness. "Then if you have still the same sense of honour that made you keep faith with the bookmakers--you didn't run away from them!--read it now, here in my presence. Read it, Shiel. I demand that you read it now. It is my right. You are in honour bound--"

It was the only way. She dare not give him time to question, to suspect; she must sweep him along to conviction. She was by no means sure that there wasn't a flaw in the scheme somewhere, something that would betray her; and she could hardly wait till it was over, till he had read the letter.

In a moment he was again near her with the letter in his hand.

"Yes, that's it--that's the letter," she said, with wondering and reproachful eyes. "I remember the little scratchy blot from the pen on the envelope. There it is, just as I made it five years ago. But how disgracefully soiled the envelope is! I suppose it has been tossed about in your saddle-bag, or with your old clothes, and only kept to remind you day by day that you had a wife you couldn't live with--kept as a warning never to think of her except to say, 'I hate you, Mona, because you are rich and heartless, and not bigger than a pinch of snuff.' That was the kind way you used to speak of her even when you were first married to her--contemptuously always in your heart, no matter what you said out loud. And the end showed it--the end showed it; you deserted her."

He was so fascinated by the picture she made of passion and incensed declamation that he did not attempt to open the letter, and he wondered why there was such a difference between the effect of her temper on him now and the effect of it those long years ago. He had no feeling of uneasiness in her presence now, no sense of irritation. In spite of her tirade, he had a feeling that it didn't matter, that she must bluster in her tiny teacup if she wanted to do so.

"Open the letter at once," she insisted. "If you don't, I will." She made as though to take the letter from him, but with a sudden twist he tore open the envelope. The bank-notes fell to the floor as he took out the sheet inside. Wondering, he stooped to pick them up.

"Four thousand pounds!" he exclaimed, examining them. "What does it mean?"

"Read," she commanded.

He devoured the letter. His eyes swam; then there rushed into them the flame which always made them illumine his mediaeval face like the light from "the burning bush." He did not question or doubt, because he saw what he wished to see, which is the way of man. It all looked perfectly natural and convincing to him.

"Mona--Mona--heaven above and all the gods of hell and Hellas, what a fool, what a fool I've been!" he exclaimed. "Mona--Mona, can you forgive your idiot husband? I didn't read this letter because I thought it was going to slash me on the raw--on the raw flesh of my own lacerating. I simply couldn't bear to read what your brother said was in the letter. Yet I couldn't destroy it, either. It was you. I had to keep it. Mona, am I too big a fool to be your husband?"

He held out his arms with a passionate exclamation. "I asked you to kiss me yesterday, and you wouldn't," she protested. "I tried to make you love me yesterday, and you wouldn't. When a woman gets a rebuff like that, when--"

She could not bear it any longer. With a cry of joy she was in his arms.

After a moment he said, "The best of all was, that you--you vixen, you bet on that Derby and won, and--"

"With your money, remember, Shiel."

"With my money!" he cried exultingly. "Yes, that's the best of it--the next best of it. It was your betting that was the best of all--the best thing you ever did since we married, except your coming here."

"It's in time to help you, too--with your own money, isn't it?"

He glanced at his watch. "Hours--I'm hours to the good. That crowd--that gang of thieves--that bunch of highwaymen! I've got them--got them, and got a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, too, to start again at home, at Lammis, Mona, back on the--but no, I'm not sure that I can live there now after this big life out here."

"I'm not so sure, either," Mona replied, with a light of larger understanding in her eyes. "But we'll have to go back and stop the world talking, and put things in shape before we come here to stay."

"To stay here--do you mean that?" he asked eagerly.

"Somewhere in this big land," she replied softly; "anyhow, to stay here till I've grown up a little. I wasn't only small in body in the old days, I was small in mind, Shiel."

"Anyhow, I've done with betting and racing, Mona. I've just got time left--I'm only thirty-nine--to start and really do something with myself."

"Well, start now, dear man of Lammis. What is it you have to do before twelve o'clock to-night?" "What is it? Why, I have to pay over two thousand of this,"--he flourished the banknotes--"and even then I'll still have two thousand left. But wait--wait. There was the original fifty pounds. Where is that fifty pounds, little girl alive? Out with it. This is the profit. Where is the fifty you staked?" His voice was gay with raillery.

She could look him in the face now and prevaricate without any shame or compunction at all. "That fifty pounds--that! Why, I used it to buy my ticket for Canada. My husband ought to pay my expenses out to him."

He laughed greatly. All Ireland was rioting in his veins now. He had no logic or reasoning left. "Well, that's the way to get into your old man's heart, Mona. To think of that! I call it tact divine. Everything has spun my way at last. I was right about that Derby, after all. It was in my bones that I'd make a pot out of it, but I thought I had lost it all when Flamingo went down."

"You never know your luck--you used to say that, Shiel."

"I say it again. Come, we must tell our friends--Kitty, her mother, and the Young Doctor. You don't know what good friends they have been to me, mavourneen."

"Yes, I think I do," said Mona, opening the door to the outer room.

Then Crozier called with a great, cheery voice--what Mona used to call his tally-ho voice. Mrs. Tynan appeared, smiling. She knew at a glance what had happened. It was so interesting that she could even forgive Mona.

"Where's Kitty?" asked Crozier, almost boisterously.

"She has gone for a ride with John Sibley," answered Mrs. Tynan.

"Look, there she is!" said Mona, laying a hand on Crozier's arm, and pointing with the other out over the prairie.

Crozier looked out towards the northwestern horizon, and in the distance was a woman riding as hard as her horse could go, with a man galloping hard after her. It seemed as though they were riding into the sunset.

"She's riding the horse you won that race with years ago when you first came here, Mr. Crozier," said Mrs. Tynan. "John Sibley bought it from Mr. Brennan."

Mona did not see the look which came into Crozier's face as, with one hand shading his eyes and the other grasping the banknotes which were to

start him in life again, independent and self-respecting, he watched the girl riding on and on, ever ahead of the man.

It was at that moment the Young Doctor entered the room, and he distracted Mona's attention for a moment. Going forward to him Mona shook him warmly by the hand. Then she went up to Mrs. Tynan and kissed her.

"I would like to kiss your daughter too, Mrs. Tynan," Mona said. . . .
"What are you looking at so hard, Shiel?" she presently added to her husband.

He did not turn to her. His eyes were still shaded by his hand.

"That horse goes well yet," he said in a low voice. "As good as ever--as good as ever."

"He loves horses so," remarked Mona, as though she could tell Mrs. Tynan and the Young Doctor anything about Shiel Crozier which they did not know.

"Kitty rides well, doesn't she?" asked Mrs. Tynan of Crozier.

"What a pair--girl and horse!" Crozier exclaimed. "Thoroughbred--absolutely thoroughbred!"

Kitty had ridden away with her heart's secret, her very own, as she thought: but Shiel Crozier knew--the man that mattered knew.

EPILOGUE

Golden, all golden, save where there was a fringe of trees at a watercourse; save where a garden, like a spot of emerald, made a button on the royal garment wrapped across the breast of the prairie. Above, making for the trees of the foothills far away, a golden eagle floated, a prairie-hen sped affrighted from some invisible thing; and in the far distance a railway train slipped down the plain like a serpent making for a covert in the first hills of the first world that ever was.

At a casual glance the vast plain seemed uninhabited, yet here and there were men and horses, tiny in the vastness, but conquering. Here and there also--for it was July--a haymaker sharpened his scythe, and the sound came singing through the air radiant and stirring with life.

Seated in the shade of a clump of trees a girl sat with her chin in her hands looking out over the prairie, an intense dreaming in her eyes. Her horse was tethered near by, but it scarcely made a sound. It was a horse which had once won a great race, with an Irish gentleman on his back. Long time the girl sat absorbed, her golden colour, her brown-gold hair in harmony with the universal stencil of gold. With her eyes drowned in

the distance, she presently murmured something to herself, and as she did so the eyes deepened to a nameless umber tone, deeper than gold, warmer than brown; such a colour as only can be found in a jewel or in a leaf the frost has touched.

The frost had touched the soul which gave the colour to the eyes of the girl. Yet she seemed all summer, all glow and youth and gladness. Her voice was golden, too, and the words which fell from her lips were as though tuned to the sound of falling water. The tone of the voice would last when the gold of all else became faded or tarnished. It had its origin in the soul:

"Whereaway goes my lad? Tell me, has he gone alone?
Never harsh word did I speak; never hurt I gave;
Strong he was and beautiful; like a heron he has flown
Hereaway, hereaway will I make my grave."

The voice lingered on the words till it trailed away into nothing, like the vanishing note of a violin which seems still to pulse faintly after the sound has ceased.

"But he did not go alone, and I have not made my grave," the girl said, and raised her head at the sound of footsteps. With an effort she emerged from the half-trance in which she had been, and smiled at a man hastening towards her.

"Dear bully, bulbous being--how that word 'bully' would have, made her cringe!" she said as the man ambled nearer. He could not go as fast as his mind urged him.

"I've got news--news, news!" he exclaimed, wading through his own perspiration to where she sat. "I can guess what it is," the girl remarked smilingly, as she reached out a hand to him, but remained seated. "It's a real, live baby born to Lydia, wife of Methuselah, the woman also being of goodly years. It is, isn't it."

"The fattest, finest, most 'scrumpshus' son of all the ages that ever--"

Kitty laughed happily and very whimsically. "Like none since Moses was found among the bulrushes! Where was this one found, and what do you intend to call him--Jesse, after his 'pa'?"

"No--nothing so common. He's to be called Shiel--Shiel Crozier Bulrush, that's to be his name."

The face of the girl became a shade pensive now. "Oh! And do you think you can guarantee that he will be worth the name? Do you never think what his father is?"

"I'm starting him right with that name. I can do so much, anyway," laughed the imperturbable one. "And Mrs. Bulrush, after her great effort--how is she?"

"Flying--simply flying. Earth not good enough for her. Simply flying. But here--here is more news. Guess what--it's for you. I've just come from the post office, and they said there was an English letter for you, so I brought it."

He handed it over. She laid it in her lap and waited as though for him to go.

"Can't I hear how he is? He's the best man that ever crossed my path," he said.

"It happens to be in his wife's, not his, handwriting--did ever such a scrap of a woman write so sprawling a hand!" she replied, holding the letter up.

"But she'll let us know in the letter how Crozier is, won't she?"

Kitty had now recovered herself, and slowly she opened the envelope and took out the letter. As she did so something fluttered to the ground.

Jesse Bulrush picked it up. "That looks nice," he said, and he whistled in surprise. "It's a money-draft on a bank."

Kitty, whose eyes were fixed on the big, important handwriting, answered calmly and without apparently looking, as she took the paper from his hand: "Yes, it's a wedding present--five hundred dollars to buy what I like best for my home. So she says."

"Mrs. Crozier, of course."

"Of course."

"Well, that's magnificent. What will you do with it?"

Kitty rose and held out her hand. "Go back to your flying partner, happy man, and ask her what she would do with five hundred dollars if she had it."

"She'd buy her lord and master a present with it, of course," he answered.

"Good-bye, Mr. Rolyoly," she responded, laughing. "You always could think of things for other people to do; and have never done anything yourself until now. Good-bye, father."

When he was gone and out of sight her face changed. With sudden anger she crushed and crumpled up the draft for five hundred in her hand. "A token of affection from both!" she exclaimed, quoting from the letter. "One lone leaf of Irish shamrock from him would--"

She stopped. "But he will send a message of his own," she continued. "He will--he will. Even if he doesn't, I'll know that he remembers just the same. He does--he does remember."

She drew herself up with an effort, and, as it were, shook herself free from the memories which dimmed her eyes.

Not far away a man was riding towards the clump of trees where she was. She saw, and hastened to her horse.

"If I told John all I feel he'd understand. I believe he always has understood," she added with a far-off look.

The draft was still crushed in her hand when she mounted the beloved horse, whose name now was Shiel.

Presently she smoothed out the crumpled paper. "Yes, I'll take it; I'll put it by," she murmured. "John will keep on betting. He'll be broke some day and he'll need it, maybe."

A moment later she was riding hard to meet the man who, before the wheat-harvest came, would call her wife.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

He saw what he wished to see, which is the way of man
Searchers after excuses for ungoverned instincts and acts
Telling the unnecessary truth
What isn't never was to those that never knew

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