

Saltus Edgar

Mr. Incul's Misadventure



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CHAPTER I. MR. INCOUL

When Harmon Incoul's wife died, the world in which he lived said that he would not marry again. The bereavement which he had suffered was known to be bitter, and it was reported that he might betake himself to some foreign land. There was, for that matter, nothing to keep him at home. He was childless, his tastes were too simple to make it necessary for him to reside as he had, hitherto, in New York, and, moreover, he was a man whose wealth was proverbial. Had he so chosen, he had little else to do than to purchase a ticket and journey wheresoever he listed, and the knowledge of this ability may have been to him not without its consolations. Yet, if he attempted to map some plan, and think which spot he would prefer, he probably reflected that whatever place he might choose, he would, in the end, be not unlike the invalid who turns over in his bed, and then turns back again on finding the second position no better than the first. However fair another sky might be, it would not make his sorrow less acute.

He was then one of those men whose age is difficult to

determine. He had married when quite young, and at the time of his widowerhood he must have been nearly forty, but years had treated him kindly. His hair, it is true, was inclined to scantiness, and his skin was etiolated, but he was not stout, his teeth were sound, he held himself well, and his eyes had not lost their lustre. At a distance, one might have thought him in the thirties, but in conversation his speech was so measured, and about his lips there was a compression such that the ordinary observer fancied him older than he really was.

His position was unexceptionable. He had inherited a mile of real estate in a populous part of New York, together with an accumulation of securities sufficient for the pay and maintenance of a small army. The foundations of this wealth had been laid by an ancestor, materially increased by his grandfather, and consolidated by his father, who had married a Miss Van Tromp, the ultimate descendant of the Dutch admiral.

His boyhood had not been happy. His father had been a lean, taciturn, unlovable man, rigid in principles, stern in manner, and unyielding in his adherence to the narrowest tenets of Presbyterianism. His mother had died while he was yet in the nursery, and, in the absence of any softening influence, the angles of his earliest nature were left in the rough.

At school, he manifested a vindictiveness of disposition which made him feared and disliked. One day, a comrade raised the lid of a desk adjoining his own. The raising of the lid was abrupt and possibly intentional. It jarred him in a task. The boy was

dragged from him senseless and bleeding. In college, he became aggrieved at a tutor. For three weeks he had him shadowed, then, having discovered an irregularity in his private life, he caused to be laid before the faculty sufficient evidence to insure his removal. Meanwhile, acting presumably on the principle that an avowed hatred is powerless, he treated the tutor as though the grievance had been forgotten. A little later, owing to some act of riotous insubordination, he was himself expelled, and the expulsion seemed to have done him good. He went to Paris and listened decorously to lectures at the Sorbonne, after which he strayed to Heidelberg, where he sat out five semesters without fighting a duel or making himself ill with beer. In his fourth summer abroad, he met the young lady who became his wife. His father died, he returned to New York, and thereafter led a model existence.

He was proud of his wife and indulgent to her every wish. During the years that they lived together, there was no sign or rumor of the slightest disagreement. She was of a sweet and benevolent disposition, and though beyond a furtive coin he gave little to the poor, he encouraged her to donate liberally to the charities which she was solicited to assist. She was a woman with a quick sense of the beautiful, and in spite of the simplicity of his own tastes, he had a house on Madison avenue rebuilt and furnished in such a fashion that it was pointed out to strangers as one of the chief palaces of the city. She liked, moreover, to have her friends about her, and while he cared as much for

society as he did for the negro minstrels, he insisted that she should give entertainments and fill the house with guests. In the winter succeeding the fifteenth anniversary of their marriage, Mrs. Incoul caught a chill, took to her bed and died, forty-eight hours later, of pneumonia.

It was then that the world said that he would not marry again. For two years he gave the world no reason to say otherwise, and for two years time hung heavy on his hands. He was an excellent chess-player, and interested in archæological pursuits, but beyond that his resources were limited. He was too energetic to be a dilettante, he had no taste for horseflesh, the game of speculation did not interest him, and his artistic tendencies were few. Now and then, a Mr. Blydenburg, a florid, talkative man, a widower like himself, came to him of an evening, and the chess-board was prepared. But practically his life was one of solitude, and the solitude grew irksome to him.

Meanwhile his wound healed as wounds do. The cicatrix perhaps was ineffaceable, but at least the smart had subsided, and in its subsidence he found that the great house in which he lived had taken on the silence of a tomb. Soon he began to go out a little. He was seen at meetings of the Archæological Society and of an afternoon he was visible in the Park. He even attended a reception given to an English thinker, and one night applauded Salvini.

At first he went about with something of that uncertainty which visits one who passes from a dark room to a bright one, but

in a little while his early constraint fell from him, and he found that he could mingle again with his fellows.

At some entertainment he met a delicious young girl, Miss Maida Barhyte by name, whom for the moment he admired impersonally, as he might have admired a flower, and until he saw her again, forgot her very existence. It so happened, however, that he saw her frequently. One evening he sat next to her at a dinner and learning from her that she was to be present at a certain reception, made a point of being present himself.

This reception was given by Mrs. Bachelor, a lady, well known in society, who kept an unrevised list, and at stated intervals issued invitations to the dead, divorced and defaulted. When she threw her house open, she liked to have it filled, and to her discredit it must be said that in that she invariably succeeded. On the evening that Mr. Incoul crossed her vestibule, he was met by a hum of voices, broken by the rhythm of a waltz. The air was heavy, and in the hall was a smell of flowers and of food. The rooms were crowded. His friend Blydenburg was present and with him his daughter. The Wainwarings, whom he had always known, were also there, and there were other people by whom he had not been forgotten, and with whom he exchanged a word, but for Miss Barhyte he looked at first in vain.

He would have gone, a crowd was as irksome to him as solitude, but in passing an outer room elaborately supplied with paintings and bric-à-brac, he caught a glimpse of the girl talking with a young man whom he vaguely remembered to have seen in

earlier days at his own home.

He walked in: Miss Barhyte greeted him as an old friend: there were other people near her, and the young man with whom she had been talking turned and joined them, and presently passed with them into another room.

Mr. Incoul found a seat beside the girl, and, after a little unimportant conversation asked her a question at which she started. But Mr. Incoul was not in haste for an answer, he told her that with her permission, he would do himself the honor of calling on her later, and, as the room was then invaded by some of her friends, he left her to them, and went his way.

CHAPTER II.

MISS BARHYTE AGREES TO CHANGE HER NAME

A day or two after Mrs. Bachelor's reception, Mr. Incoul walked down Madison avenue, turned into one of the adjacent streets and rang the bell of a private boarding-house.

As he stood on the steps waiting for the door to be opened, a butcher-boy passed, whistling shrilly. Across the way a nurse-maid was idling with a perambulator, a slim-figured girl hurried by, a well-dressed woman descended from a carriage and a young man with a flower in his button-hole issued from a neighboring house. The nurse-maid stayed the perambulator and scrutinized the folds of the woman's gown; the young man eyed the hurrying girl; from the end of the street came the whistle of the retreating butcher, and as it fused into the rumble of Fifth avenue, Mr. Incoul heard the door opening behind him.

"Is Miss Barhyte at home?" he asked.

The servant, a negro, answered that she was.

"Then be good enough," said Mr. Incoul, "to take her this card."

The drawing-room, long and narrow, as is usual in many New York houses, was furnished in that fashion which is suggestive of a sheriff's sale, and best calculated to jar the nerves. Mr. Incoul

did not wince. He gave the appointments one cursory, reluctant glance, and then went to the window. Across the way the nurse-maid still idled, the young man with a flower was drawing on a red glove, stitched with black, and as he looked out at them he heard a rustle, and turning, saw Miss Barhyte.

“I have come for an answer,” he said simply.

“I am glad to see you,” she answered, “very glad; I have thought much about what you said.”

“Favorably, I hope.”

“That must depend on you.” She went to a bell and touched it. “Archibald,” she said, when the negro appeared, “I am out. If any visitors come take them into the other room. Should any one want to come in here before I ring, say the parlor is being swept.”

The man bowed and withdrew. He would have stood on his head for her. There were few servants that she did not affect in much the same manner. She seemed to win willingness naturally.

She seated herself on a sofa, and opposite to her Mr. Incoul found a chair. Her dress he noticed was of some dark material, tailor-made, and unrelieved save by a high white collar and the momentary glisten of a button. The cut and sobriety of her costume made her look like a handsome boy, a young Olympian as it were, one who had strayed from the games and been arrayed in modern guise. Indeed, her features suggested that combination of beauty and sensitiveness which was peculiar to the Greek lad, but her eyes were not dark – they were the blue victorious eyes of the Norseman – and her hair was red, the red of old gold, that

red which partakes both of orange and of flame.

“I hope – ” Mr. Incoul began, but she interrupted him.

“Wait,” she said, “I have much to tell you of which the telling is difficult. Will you bear with me a moment?”

“Surely,” he answered.

“It is this: It is needless for me to say I esteem you; it is unnecessary for me to say that I respect you, but it is because I do both that I feel I may speak frankly. My mother wishes me to marry you, but I do not. Let me tell you, first, that when my father died he left very little, but the little that he left seems to have disappeared, I do not know how or where. I know merely that we have next to nothing, and that we are in debt beside. Something, of course, has had to be done. I have found a position. Where do you suppose?” she asked, with a sudden smile and a complete change of key.

But Mr. Incoul had no surmises.

“In San Francisco! The MacDermotts, you know, the Bonanza people, want me to return with them and teach their daughter how to hold herself, and what not to say. It has been arranged that I am to go next week. Since the other night, however, my mother has told me to give up the MacDermotts and accept your offer. But that, of course, I cannot do.”

“And why not?”

To this Miss Barhyte made no answer.

“You do not care for me, I know; there is slight reason why you should. Yet, might you not, perhaps, in time?”

The girl raised her eyebrows ever so slightly. "So you see," she continued, "I shall have to go to San Francisco."

Mr. Incoul remained silent a moment. "If," he said, at last, "if you will do me the honor to become my wife, in time you will care. It is painful for me to think of you accepting a position which at best is but a shade better than that of a servant, particularly so when I am able – nay, anxious," he added, pensively – "to surround you with everything which can make life pleasant. I am not old," he went on to say, "at least not so old that a marriage between us should seem incongruous. I find that I am sincerely attached to you – unselfishly, perhaps, would be the better word – and, if the privilege could be mine, the endeavor to make you happy would be to me more grateful than a second youth. Can you not accept me?"

He had been speaking less to her than to the hat which he held in his hand. The phrases had come from him haltingly, one by one, as though he had sought to weigh each mentally before dowering it with the wings of utterance, but, as he addressed this question he looked up at her. "Can you not?" he repeated.

Miss Barhyte raised a handkerchief to her lips and bit the shred of cambric with the *disinvoltura* of an heiress.

"Why is it," she queried, "why is it that marriage ever was invented? Why cannot a girl accept help from a man without becoming his wife?"

Mr. Incoul was about to reply that many do, but he felt that such a reply would be misplaced, and he called a platitude to his

rescue. "There are wives and wives," he said.

"That is it," the girl returned, the color mounting to her cheeks; "if I could but be to you one of the latter."

He stared at her wonderingly, almost hopefully. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Did you ever read 'Eugénie Grandet'?"

"No," he answered, "I never have."

"Well, I read it years ago. It is, I believe, the only one of Balzac's novels that young girls are supposed to read. It is tiresome indeed; I had almost forgotten it, but yesterday I remembered enough of the story to help me to come to some decision. In thinking the matter over and over again as I have done ever since I last saw you it has seemed that I could not become your wife unless you were willing to make the same agreement with me that Eugénie Grandet's husband made with her."

"What was the nature of that agreement?"

"It was that, though married, they were to live as though they were not married – as might brother and sister."

"Always?"

"Yes."

"No," Mr. Incoul answered, "to such an agreement I could not consent. Did I do so, I would be untrue to myself, unmanly to you. But if you will give me the right to aid you and yours, I will – according to my lights – leave nothing undone to make you contented; and if I succeed in so doing, if you are happy,

then the agreement which you have suggested would fall of itself. Would it not?" he continued. "Would it not be baseless? See –" he added, and he made a vague gesture, but before he could finish the phrase, the girl's hands were before her face and he knew that she was weeping.

Mr. Incoul was not tender-hearted. He felt toward Miss Barhyte as were she some poem in flesh that it would be pleasant to make his own. In her carriage as in her looks, he had seen that stamp of breeding which is coercive even to the dissolute. In her eyes he had discerned that promise of delight which it is said the lost goddesses could convey; and at whose conveyance, the legend says, the minds of men were enraptured. It was in this wise that he felt to her. Such exhilaration as she may have brought him was of the spirit, and being cold by nature and undemonstrative, her tears annoyed him. He would have had her impassive, as befitted her beauty. Beside, he was annoyed at his own attitude. Why should there be sorrow where he had sought to bring smiles? But he had barely time to formulate his annoyance into a thing even as volatile as thought – the girl had risen and was leaving the room.

As she moved to the door Mr. Incoul hastened to open it for her, but she reached it before him and passed out unassisted.

When she had gone he noticed that the sun was setting and that the room was even more hideous than before. He went again to the window wondering how to act. The entire scene was a surprise to him. He had come knowing nothing of the

girl's circumstances, and suddenly he learned that she was in indigence, unable perhaps to pay her board bills and worried by small tradesmen. He had come prepared to be refused and she had almost accepted him. But what an acceptance! In the nature of it his thoughts roamed curiously: he was to be a little more than kin, a little less than kind. She would accept him as a husband for out-of-door purposes, for the world's sake she would bear his name – at arm's length. According to the terms of her proposition were she ever really his wife it would be tantamount to a seduction. He was to be with her, and yet, until she so willed it, unable to call her his own. And did he refuse these terms, she was off, no one knew whither. But he had not refused, he told himself, he had indeed not refused, he had merely suggested an amendment which turned an impossibility into an allurements. What pleasanter thing could there be than the winning of one's own wife? The idea was so novel it delighted him. For the moment he preferred it to any other; beside it his former experience seemed humdrum indeed. But why had she wept? Her reasons, however, he had then no chance to elucidate. Miss Barhyte returned as abruptly as she had departed.

“Forgive me,” she said, advancing to where he stood, “it was stupid of me to act as I did. I am sorry – are we still friends?” Her eyes were clear as had she never wept, but there were circles about them, and her face was colorless.

“Friends,” he answered, “yes, and more – ” He hesitated a moment, and then hastily added, “It is agreed, then, is it not, you

will be my wife?"

"I will be your wife?"

"As Balzac's heroine was to her husband?"

"You have said it."

"But not always. If there come a time when you care for me, then I may ask you to give me your heart as to-day I have asked for your hand?"

"When that day comes, believe me," she said, and her delicious face took on a richer hue, "when that day comes there will be neither asking nor giving, we shall have come into our own."

With this assurance Mr. Incoul was fain to be content, and, after another word or two, he took his leave.

For some time after his departure, Miss Barhyte stood thinking. It had grown quite dark. Before the window a street lamp burned with a small, steady flame, but beyond, the azure of the electric light pervaded the adjacent square with a suggestion of absinthe and vice. One by one the opposite houses took on some form of interior illumination. A newsboy passed, hawking an extra with a noisy, aggressive ferocity as though he were angry with the neighborhood, and dared it come out and wrestle with him for his wares. There was a thin broken stream of shop-girls passing eastward; at intervals, men in evening dress sauntered leisurely to their dinners, to restaurants, or to clubland, and over the rough pavement there was a ceaseless rattle of traps and of wagons; the air was alive with the indefinable murmurs of a great

city.

Miss Barhyte noticed none of these things. She had taken her former seat on the sofa and sat, her elbow on her crossed knee, her chin resting in her hand, while the fingers touched and barely separated her lips. The light from without was just strong enough to reach her feet and make visible the gold clock on her silk stocking, but her face was in the shadow as were her thoughts.

Presently she rose and rang the bell. "Archibald," she said, when the man came, and who at once busied himself with lighting the gas, "I want to send a note; can't you take it? It's only across the square."

"I'll have to be mighty spry about it, miss. The old lady do carry on most unreasonable if I go for anybody but herself. She has laws that strict they'd knock the Swedes and Prussians silly. Why, you wouldn't believe if I told you how –"

And Archibald ran on with an unbelievable tale of recent adventure with the landlady. But the girl feigned no interest. She had taken a card from her case. On it she wrote, *Viens ce soir*, and after running the pencil through her name, she wrote on the other side, Lenox Leigh, esq., Athenæum Club.

"There," she said, interrupting the negro in the very climax of his story, "it's for Mr. Leigh; you are sure to find him, so wait for an answer."

A fraction of an hour later, when Miss Barhyte took her seat at the dinner table, she found beside her plate a note that contained a single line: "Will be with you at nine. I kiss your lips. L. L."

CHAPTER III.

AFTER DARKNESS

When Miss Barhyte was one year younger she had gone with her mother to pass the summer at Mt. Desert; and there, the morning of her arrival, on the monster angle of Rodick's porch, Lenox Leigh had caused himself to be presented.

A week later Miss Barhyte and her new acquaintance were as much gossiped about as was possible in that once unconventional resort.

Lenox Leigh was by birth a Baltimorean, and by profession a gentleman of leisure, yet as the exercise of that profession is considered less profitable in Baltimore than in New York, he had, for some time past, been domiciled in the latter city. From the onset he was well received; one of the Amsterdams had married a Leigh, his only sister had charmed the heart of Nicholas Manhattan, and being in this wise connected with two of the reigning families, he found the doors open as a matter of course. But even in the absence of potent relatives, there was no reason why he should not have been cordially welcomed. He was, it is true, better read than nineteen men out of twenty; when he went to the opera he preferred listening to the music to wandering from box to box; he declined to figure in cotillons and at no dinner, at no supper had he been known to drink anything

stronger than claret and water.

But as an offset to these defects he was one of the most admirably disorganized young men that ever trod Fifth avenue. He was without beliefs and without prejudices; added to this he was indulgent to the failings of others, or perhaps it would be better to say that he was indifferent. It may be that the worst thing about him was that he was not bad enough; his wickedness, such as there was of it, was purely negative. A poet of the decadence of that period in fact when Rome had begun to weary of debauchery without yet acquiring a taste for virtue, a pre-mediæval Epicurean, let us say, could not have pushed a creedless refinement to a greater height than he. There were men who thought him a prig, and who said so when his back was turned.

It was in the company of this patrician of a later day that Miss Barhyte participated in the enjoyments of Mt. Desert. Leigh was then in his twenty-fifth year, and Miss Barhyte was just grazing the twenties. He was attractive in appearance, possessed of those features which now and then permit a man to do without beard or moustache, and his hair, which was black, clung so closely to his head that at a distance it might have been taken for the casque of a Saracen. To Miss Barhyte, as already noted, a full share of beauty had been allotted. Together they formed one of the most charming couples that it has ever been the historian's privilege to admire. And being a charming couple, and constantly together, they excited much interest in the minds of certain ladies who hailed from recondite Massachusettsian regions.

To this interest they were indifferent. At first, during the early evenings when the stars were put out by the Northern Lights, they rowed to the outermost shore of a neighboring island and lingered there for hours in an enchanted silence. Later, in the midsummer nights, when the harvest-moon was round and mellow, they wandered through the open fields back into the Dantesque forests and strayed in the clinging shadows and inviting solitudes of the pines.

From one such excursion they returned to the hotel at an hour which startled the night porter, who, in that capricious resort, should have lost his ability to be startled at anything.

That afternoon Mrs. Bunker Hill – one of the ladies to whom allusion has been made – approached Miss Barhyte on the porch. “And are you to be here much longer?” she asked, after a moment or two of desultory conversation.

“The holidays are almost over,” the girl answered, with her radiant smile.

“*Holidays* do you call them? *Holidays* did I understand you to say? *I* should have called them *fast* days.” And, with that elaborate witticism, Mrs. Bunker Hill shook out her skirts and sailed away.

Meanwhile an enveloping intimacy had sprung up between the two young people. Their conversation need not be chronicled. There was in it nothing unusual and nothing particularly brilliant; it was but a strain from that archaic duo in which we have all taken part and which at each repetition seems an original theme.

For the first time Miss Barhyte learned the intoxication of love. She gave her heart ungrudgingly, without calculation, without forethought, wholly, as a heart should be given and freely as had the gift been consecrated in the nave of a cathedral. If she were generous why should she be blamed? In the giving she found that mite of happiness, that one unclouded day that is fair as June roses and dawns but once.

In September Miss Barhyte went with her mother on a visit in the Berkshire Hills. Leigh journeyed South. A matter of business claimed his attention in Baltimore, and when, early in November, he reached New York the girl had already returned.

Since the death of Barhyte *père* she had lived with her mother in a small house in Irving Place, which they rented, furnished, by the year. But on this particular autumn affairs had gone so badly, some stock had depreciated, some railroad had been mismanaged, or some trustee had speculated – something, in fact, had happened of which no one save those personally interested ever know or ever care, and, as a result, the house in Irving Place was given up, and the mother and daughter moved into a boarding-house.

Of all this Lenox Leigh was made duly aware. Had he been able, and could such a thing have been proper and conventional, he would have been glad indeed to offer assistance; he was not selfish, but then he was not rich, a condition which always makes unselfishness easy. Matrimony was out of the question; his income was large enough to permit him to live without running

into debt, but beyond that its flexibility did not extend, and in money matters, and in money matters alone, Lenox Leigh was the most scrupulous of men. Beside, as the phrase goes, he was not a marrying man – marriage, he was accustomed to assert, means one woman more and one man less, and beyond that definition he steadfastly declined to look, except to announce that, like some other institutions, matrimony was going out of fashion.

That winter Miss Barhyte was more circumspect. It was not that her affection had faltered, but in the monochromes of a great city the primal glamour that was born of the fields and of the sea lost its lustre. Then, too, Lenox in the correctness of evening dress was not the same adorer who had lounged in flannels at her side, and the change from the open country to the boarding-house parlor affected their spirits unconsciously.

And so the months wore away. There were dinners and routs which the young people attended in common, there were long walks on avenues unfrequented by fashion, and there were evenings prearranged which they passed together and during which the girl's mother sat up stairs and thought her own thoughts.

Mrs. Barhyte had been a pretty woman and inconsequential, as pretty woman are apt to be. Her girlhood had been of the happiest, without a noteworthy grief. She married one whose perfection had seemed to her impeccable, and then suddenly without a monition the tide of disaster set in. After the birth of a second child, Maida, her husband began to drink, and drank,

after each debauch with a face paler than before, until disgrace came and with it a plunge into the North River. Her elder child, a son, on whom she placed her remaining hopes, had barely skirted manhood before he was taken from her to die of small-pox in a hospital. Then came a depreciation in the securities which she held and in its train the small miseries of the shabby genteel. Finally, the few annual thousands that were left to her seemed to evaporate, and as she sat in her room alone her thoughts were bitter. The pretty inconsequential girl had developed into a woman, hardened yet unresigned. At forty-five her hair was white, her face was colorless as her widow's cap, her heart was dead.

On the night when her daughter, under the chaperonage of Mrs. Hildred, one of her few surviving relatives – returned from the reception, she was still sitting up. At Mrs. Hildred's suggestion a position, to which allusion has been made, had been offered to her daughter, and that position – the bringing up or rather the bringing out of a child of the West – she determined that her daughter should accept. Afterwards – well, perhaps for Maida there were other things in store, as for herself she expected little. She would betake herself to some Connecticut village and there wait for death.

When her daughter entered the room she was sitting in the erect impassibility of a statue. Her eyes indeed were restless, but her face was dumb, and in the presence of that silent desolation, the girl's tender heart was touched.

“Mother!” she exclaimed, “why did you wait up for me?” And she found a seat on the sofa near her mother and took her hand caressingly in her own. “Why are you up so late,” she continued, “are you not tired? Oh, mother,” the girl cried, impetuously, “if you only knew what happened to-night – what do you suppose?”

But Mrs. Barhite shook her head, she had no thoughts left for suppositions. And quickly, for the mere sake of telling something that would arouse her mother if ever so little from her apathy, Maida related Mr. Incoul’s offer. Her success was greater, if other, than she anticipated. It was as though she had poured into a parching throat the very waters of life. It was the post tenebras, lux. And what a light! The incandescence of unexpected hope. A cataract of gold pieces could not have been more dazzling; it was blinding after the shadows in which she had groped. The color came to her cheeks, her hand grew moist. “Yes, yes,” she cried, urging the girl’s narrative with a motion of the head like to that of a jockey speeding to the post; “yes, yes,” she repeated, and her restless eyes flamed with the heat of fever.

“Wasn’t it odd?” Maida concluded abruptly.

“But you accepted him?” the mother asked hoarsely, almost fiercely.

“Accepted him? No, of course not – he – why, mother, what is the matter?”

Engrossed in the telling of her story, the girl had not noticed her mother’s agitation, but at her last words, at the answer to the question, her wrist had been caught as in a vise, and eyes that she

no longer recognized – eyes dilated with anger, desperation and revulsion of feeling – were staring into her own. Instinctively she drew back – “Oh, mother, what is it?” And the mother bending forward, even as the daughter retreated, hissed, “You shall accept him – I say you shall!”

“Mother, mother,” the girl moaned, helplessly.

“You shall accept him, do you hear me?”

“But, mother, how can I?” The tears were rolling down her cheeks, she was frightened – the acute, agonizing fright of a child pursued. She tried to free herself, but the hands on her wrist only tightened, and her mother’s face, livid now, was close to her own.

“You shall accept him,” she repeated with the insistence of a monomaniac. And the girl, with bended head, through the paroxysms of her sobs, could only murmur in piteous, beseeching tones, “Mother! mother!”

But to the plaint the woman was as deaf as her heart was dumb. She indeed loosened her hold and the girl fell back on the lounge from which they had both arisen, but it was only to summon from the reservoirs of her being some new strength wherewith to vanquish. For a moment she stood motionless, watching the girl quiver in her emotion, and as the sobbing subsided, she stretched forth her hand again, and caught her by the shoulder.

“Look up at me,” she said, and the girl, obedient, rose from her seat and gazed imploringly in her mother’s face. No Neapolitan fish-wife was ever more eager to barter her daughter than was

this lady of acknowledged piety and refinement, and the face into which her daughter looked and shrank from bore no trace of pity or compassion. “Tell me if you dare,” she continued, “tell me why it is that you refuse? What more do you want? Are you a princess of the blood? Perhaps you will say you don’t love him! And what if you don’t? I loved your father and look at me now! Beside, you have had enough of that – there, don’t stare at me in that way. I know, and so do you. Now take your choice – accept this offer or get to your lover – and this very night. As for me, I disown you, I – ”

But the flood of words was interrupted – the girl had fainted. The simulachre of death had extended its kindly arms, and into them she had fallen as into a grateful release.

By the morrow her spirit was broken. Two days later Mr. Incoul called with what success the reader has been already informed, and on that same evening in obedience to the note, came Lenox Leigh.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EVENING CALL

When Leigh entered the drawing-room he found Miss Barhyte already there. "It is good of you to come," she said, by way of greeting.

The young man advanced to where she stood, and in a tender, proprietary manner, took her hand in his; he would have kissed her, but she turned her face aside.

"What is it?" he asked; "you are pale as Ophelia."

"And you, my prince, as inquisitive as Hamlet."

She led him to a seat and found one for herself. Her eyes rested in his own, and for a moment both were silent.

"Lenox," she asked at last, "do you know Mr. Incoul?"

"Yes, of course; every one does."

"I mean do you know him well?"

"I never said ten words to him, nor he to me."

"So much the better. What do you suppose he did the other evening after you went away?"

"Really, I have no idea, but if you wish me to draw on my imagination, I suppose he went away too."

"He offered himself."

"For what?"

"To me."

“Maida, that mummy! You are joking.”

“No, I am not joking, nor was he.”

“Well, what then?”

“Then, as you say, he went away.”

“And what did you do?”

“I went away too.”

“Be serious; tell me about it.”

“He came here this afternoon, and I – well – I am to be Mrs. Incoul.”

Lenox bit his lip. Into his face there came an expression of angered resentment. He stood up from his seat; the girl put out her hand as though to stay him: “Lenox, I had to,” she cried. But he paid no attention to her words and crossed the room.

On the mantel before him was a clock that ticked with a low, doleful moan, and for some time he stood looking at it as were it an object of peculiar interest which he had never before enjoyed the leisure to examine. But the clock might have swooned from internal pain, he neither saw nor heard it; his thoughts circled through episodes of the winter back to the forest and the fringes of the summer sea. And slowly the anger gave way to wonder, and presently the wonder faded and in its place there came a sentiment like that of sorrow, a doubled sorrow in whose component parts there was both pity and distress.

It is said that the rich are without appreciation of their wealth until it is lost or endangered, and it was not until that evening that Lenox Leigh appreciated at its worth the loveliness that

was slipping from him. He knew then that he might tread the highroads and faubourgs of two worlds with the insistence of the Wandering Jew, and yet find no one so delicious as she. And in the first flood of his anger he felt as were he being robbed, as though the one thing that had lifted him out of the brutal commonplaces of the every day was being caught up and carried beyond the limits of vision. And into this resentment there came the suspicion that he was not alone being robbed, that he was being cheated to boot, that the love which he had thought to receive as he had seemed to give love before, was an illusory representation, a phantom constructed of phrases.

But this suspicion faded; he knew untold that the girl's whole heart was his, had been his, was yet his and probably would be his for all of time, till the grave opened and closed again. And then the wonder came. He knew, none better, the purity of her heart, and knowing, too, her gentleness, the sweetness of her nature, her abnegation of self, he began to understand that some tragedy had been enacted which he had not been called upon to witness. Of her circumstances he had been necessarily informed. But in the sensitiveness of her refinement the girl had shrunk from unveiling to a lover's eyes the increasing miseries of her position, and of the poignancy of those miseries he had now, uninformed, an inkling. If she sold herself, surely it was because the sale was imperative. The white impassible face of the girl's mother rose before him and then, at once, he understood her cry, "Lenox, I had to."

As he moved from her, Maida had seen the anger, and knowing the anger to be as just as justice ever is, she shook her head in helpless grief, yet her eyes were tearless as had she no tears left to shed. She had seen the anger, but ignorant of the phases of thought by which it had been transfigured she stole up to where he stood and touched his arm with a shrinking caress.

He turned and would have caught her to him, but she drew back, elusively, as might a swan. "No, not that, Lenox. Only say that you do not hate me. Lenox, if you only knew. To me it is bitterer than death. You are the whole world to me, yet never must I see you again. If I could but tell you all. If I could but tell him all, if there were anything that I could do or say, but there is nothing, nothing," she added pensively, "except submission."

Her voice had sunk into a whisper: she was pleading as much with herself as with him. Her arms were pendant and her eyes downcast. On the mantel the clock kept up its low, dolorous moan, as though in sympathy with her woe. "Nothing," she repeated.

"But surely it need not be. Things cannot be so bad as that – Maida, I cannot lose you. If nothing else can be done, let us go away; at its best New York is tiresome; we could both leave it without a regret or a wish to return. And then, there is Italy; we have but to choose. Why, I could take a palace on the Grand Canal for less than I pay for my rooms at the Cumberland. And you would love Venice; and in winter there is Capri and Sorrento and Palermo. I have known days in Palermo when I seemed to

be living in a haze of turquoise and gold. And the nights! You should see the nights! The stars are large as lilies! See, it would be so easy; in a fortnight we could be in Genoa, and before we got there we would have been forgotten.”

He was bending forward speaking rapidly, persuasively, half hoping, half fearing, she would accept. She did not interrupt him, and he continued impetuously, as though intoxicated on his own words.

“When we are tired of the South, there are the lakes and that lovely Tyrol; there will be so much to do, so much to see. After New York, we shall really seem to live; and then, beyond, is Munich – you are sure to love that city.” He hated Munich; he hated Germany. The entire land, and everything that was in it, was odious to him; but for the moment he forgot. He would have said more, even to praises of Berlin, but the girl raised her ringless hand and shook her head wearily.

“No, Lenox, it may not be. Did I go with you, in a year – six months, perhaps – we would both regret. It would be not only expatriation; it would, for me at least, be isolation as well, and, though I would bear willingly with both, you would not. You think so now, perhaps, I do not doubt” – and a phantom of a smile crossed her face – “and I thank you for so thinking, but it may not be.”

Her hand fell to her side, and she turned listlessly away. “You must forget me, Lenox – but not too soon, will you?”

“Never, sweetheart – never!”

“Ah, but you must. And I must learn to forget you. It will be difficult. No one can be to me what you have been. You have been my youth, Lenox; my girlhood has been yours. I have nothing left. Nothing except regrets – regrets that youth should pass so quickly and that girlhood comes but once.”

Her lips were tremulous, but she was trying to be brave.

“But surely, Maida, it cannot be that we are to part forever. Afterwards – ” the word was vague, but they both understood – “afterwards I may see you. Such things often are. Because you feel yourself compelled to this step, there is no reason why I, of all others, should be shut out of your life.”

“It is the fact of your being the one of all others that makes the shutting needful.”

“It shall not be.”

“Lenox,” she pleaded, “it is harder for me than for you.”

“But how can you ask me, how can you think that I will give you up? The affair is wretched enough as it is, and now, by insisting that I am not to see you again, you would make it even worse. People think it easy to love, but it is not; I know nothing more difficult. You are the only one for whom I have ever cared. It was not difficult to do so, I admit, but the fact remains. I have loved you, I have loved you more and more every day, and now, when I love you most, when I love you as I can never love again, you find it the easiest matter in the world to come to me and say, ‘It’s ended; *bon jour*.’”

“You are cruel, Lenox, you are cruel.”

“It is you that are cruel, and there the wonder is, for your cruelty is unconscious, of your own free will you would not know how.”

“It is not that I am cruel, it is that I am trying to do right. And it is for you to aid me. I have been true to you, do not ask me now to be false to myself.”

If at that moment Mrs. Bunker Hill could have looked into the girl’s face, her suspicions would have vanished into air. Maida needed only a less fashionable gown to look like a mediæval saint; and before the honesty that was in her eyes Lenox bowed his head.

“Will you help me?”

“I will,” he answered.

“I knew you would; you are too good to try to make me more miserable than I am. And now, you must go; kiss me, it is the last time.”

He caught her in his arms and kissed her full upon the mouth. He kissed her wet eyes, her cheeks, the splendor of her hair. And after a moment of the acutest pain of all her life, the girl freed herself from his embrace, and let him go without another word.

CHAPTER V.

A YELLOW ENVELOPE

There is a peculiarity about Baden-Baden which no other watering-place seems to share – it has the aroma of a pretty woman. In August it is warm, crowded, enervating, tiresome as are all warm and crowded places, but the air is delicately freighted and a pervasive fragrance is discerned even by the indifferent.

In the summer that succeeded Maida's marriage Baden was the same tame, perfumed *zwei und funfzig* that it has ever been since the war. The ladies and gentlemen who were to regard it as a sort of continuation of the Bois de Boulogne had departed never to return. Gone was Benazet, gone, too, the click of the roulette ball. The echoes and uproars of the Second Empire had died away, as echoes and uproars ever must, and in place of the paint and cleverness of the *dames du-lac* had come the stupid loveliness of the *schwärmerisch Mädchen*.

But though Paris had turned her wicked back, the attitude of that decadent capital in no wise affected other cities. On the particular August to which allusion is made, interminable dinners were consumed by contingents from the politest lands, and also from some that were semi-barbaric.

In the Lichenthal Allée and on the promenade in front of the

Kursaal one could hear six languages in as many minutes, and given a polyglottic ear the number could have been increased to ten. Among those who added their little quota to this summer Babel were Mr. and Mrs. Incoul.

The wedding had been very simple. Mrs. Barhyte had wished the ceremony performed in Grace Church, and to the ceremony she had also wished that all New York should be bidden. To her it represented a glory which in the absence of envious witnesses would be lustreless indeed. But in this respect her wishes were disregarded. On a melting morning in early June, a handful of people, thirty at most, assembled in Mrs. Hildred's drawing-room. The grave service that is in usage among Episcopalians was mumbled by a diligent bishop, there was a hurried and heavy breakfast, and two hours later the bride and groom were on the deck of the "Umbria."

The entire affair had been conducted with the utmost dispatch. The *Sunday Sun* chronicled the engagement in one issue, and gave the date of the wedding in the next. It was not so much that Harmon Incoul was ardent in his wooing or that Miss Barhyte was anxious to assume the rank and privileges that belong to the wedded state. The incentives were other if equally prosaic. The ceremony if undergone needed to be undergone at once. Summer was almost upon them, and in the code which society has made for itself, summer weddings are reprov'd. There was indeed some question of postponing the rites until autumn. But on that Mrs. Barhyte put her foot. She was far from sure of her

daughter, and as for the other contracting party, who could tell but that he might change his mind. Such changes had been, and instances of such misconduct presented themselves unsummoned to the woman's mind. The fish had been landed almost without effort, a fish more desirable than any other, a very prize among fishes, and the possibility that he might slip away and without so much as a gill awry float off into clearer and less troubled seas, nerved her to her task anew.

In the interview which she enjoyed with her prospective son-in-law she was careful, however, to display no eagerness. She was sedate when sedateness seemed necessary, but her usual attitude was one of conciliatory disinterestedness. Her daughter's choice she told him had met with her fullest approval, and it was to her a matter of deep regret that neither her husband nor her father – the late Chief Justice Hildred, with whose name Mr. Incoul was of course familiar – that neither of them had been spared to join in the expression of her satisfaction. Of Maida it was unnecessary to speak, yet this at least should be said, she was young and she was impressionable, as young people are apt to be, but she had never given her mother cause for the slightest vexation, not the slightest. "She is a sweet girl," Mrs. Barhyte went on to say, "and one with an admirable disposition; she takes after her father in that, but she has her grandfather's intellect."

"Her beauty, madam, comes from you."

To this Mrs. Barhyte assented. "She is pretty," she said, and then in the voice of an actress who feels her rôle, "Do be good

to her," she pleaded, "she is all I have."

Mr. Incoul assured her that on that score she need give herself no uneasiness, and a few days before the wedding, begged as a particular favor to himself that after the ceremony she would take up her residence in his house. The servants, he explained, had been instructed in that respect, and a checkbook of the Chemical Bank would be handed her in defrayment of all expenses. "And to think," Mrs. Barhyte muttered to herself, "to think that I might have died in Connecticut!"

The voyage over was precisely like any other. There were six days of discomfort in the open, and between Queenstown and Liverpool unnumbered hours of gloomy and irritating delay. Mrs. Incoul grew weary of the captain's cabin and her husband was not enthusiastic on the subject of the quarters which the first officer had relinquished to him. But in dear old London, as all good Americans are wont to call that delightful city, Mrs. Incoul's spirits revived. The difference between Claridge's and Rodick's would have interested one far more apathetic than she, and as she had never before set her foot on Piccadilly, and as Rotten Row and Regent Circus were as unfamiliar to her as the banks of the Yang-tse-Kiang, she had none of that satiated feeling of the *dejà-vu* which besets the majority of us on our travels.

The notice of their arrival in the *Morning Post* had been followed by cards without limit and invitations without stint. An evening gazette published an editorial a column in length, in which after an historical review of wealth from Plutus to

the Duke of Westminster, the reader learned that the world had probably never seen a man so rich and yet seemingly so unconscious of the power which riches give as was Harmon Incolt, esq., of New York, U. S. A.

During the few weeks that were passed in London the bride and groom were bidden to more crushes, dinners and garden parties than Maida had attended during the entire course of her bud-hood. There was the inevitable presentation and as the girl's face was noticeably fair she and her husband were made welcome at Marlborough House. Afterwards, yet before the season drooped, there was a trip to Paris, a city, which, after the splendors of London, seemed cheap and tawdry indeed, and then as already noted came the villegiatura at Babel-Baden.

Meanwhile Maida had come and gone, eaten and fasted, danced and driven in a constant chase after excitement. To her husband she had acted as she might have done to some middle-aged cousin with whom she was not precisely on that which is termed a familiar footing, one on whom chance not choice had made her dependent, and to whom in consequence much consideration was due. But her relations will be perhaps better understood when it is related that she had not found herself physically capable of calling him by his given name, or in fact anything else than You. It was not that she disliked him, on the contrary, in many ways he was highly sympathetic, but the well-springs of her affection had been dried, and the season of their refreshment was yet obscure.

In the face of this half-hearted platonism Mr. Incoul had displayed a wisdom which was peculiar to himself; he exacted none of those little tributes which are conceded to be a husband's due, and he allowed himself none of the familiarities which are reported to be an appanage of the married state. From the beginning he had determined to win his wife by the exercise of that force which, given time and opportunity, a strong nature invariably exerts over a weaker one. He was indulgent but he was also austere. The ordering of one gown or of five hundred was a matter of which he left her sole mistress. Had she so desired she might have bought a jewelry shop one day and given it back as a free gift on the morrow. But on a question of ethics he allowed no appeal. The Countess of Ex, a lady of dishonor at a popular court, had, during the London season, issued cards for a ball. On the evening on which it was to take place the bride and groom had dined at one house, and gone to a musicale at another. When leaving the latter entertainment Maida told her husband to tell the man "Park Lane." Mr. Incoul, however, ordered the carriage to be driven to the hotel.

"Did you not understand me?" she asked. "I am going to the Countess of Ex's."

"She is not a woman whom I care to have you know," he replied.

"But the Prince is to be there!"

To this he assented. "Perhaps." And then he added in a voice that admitted of no further argument, "But not my wife."

Maida sank back in the carriage startled by an unexperienced emotion. For the first time since the wedding she could have kissed the man whose name she bore. It was in this way that matters shaped themselves.

Soon after reaching Paris, Mr. Blydenburg called. He had brought his daughter abroad because he did not know what else to do with her, and now that he was on the Continent he did not know what to do with himself. He explained these preoccupations and Mr. Incoul suggested that in the general exodus they should all go to Germany. To this suggestion Blydenburg gave a ready assent and that very day purchased a translation of Tacitus, a copy of Mr. Baring-Gould's Germany, a Baedeker, and a remote edition of Murray.

At the appointed date the little party started for Cologne, where, after viewing a bone of the fabulous virgin Undecemilla, they drifted to Frankfort and from there reached the Oos. In Baden, Blydenburg and his daughter elected domicile at the Englischerhof, while through the foresight of a courier, good-looking, polyglottic, idle and useful, the Incouls found a spacious apartment in the Villa Wilhelmina, a belonging of the Mesmer House.

In the drawer of the table which Maida selected as a suitable place for superfluous rings was a yellow envelope addressed to the Gräfin von Adelsburg. On the back was an attempt at addition, a double column of figures which evidently represented the hotel expenses of the lady to whom the envelope was

addressed. The figures were marked carefully that no mistake should be possible, but the sum total had been jotted down in hurried numerals, as though the mathematician had been irritated at the amount, while under all, in an indignant scrawl, was the legend "S. T."

Maida was the least inquisitive of mortals, but one evening, a week or ten days after her arrival, when she happened to be sitting in company with the Blydenburgs and her husband on the broad terrace that fronts the Kursaal, she alluded, for the mere sake of conversation, to the envelope which she had found. The Gräfin von Adelsburg it then appeared was the name with which the Empress of a neighboring realm was accustomed to veil her rank, and the legend it was suggested could only stand for *schrecklich theuer*, frightfully dear. The Empress had vacated the Villa Wilhelmina but a short time before and it seemed not improbable that the figures and conclusion were in her own imperial hand.

While this subject was under discussion the Prince of Albion sauntered down the walk. He was a handsome man, with blue projecting eyes, somewhat stout, perhaps, but not obese. In his train were two ladies and a few men. As he was about to pass Mrs. Incoul he stopped and raised his hat. It was of soft felt, she noticed, and his coat was tailless. He uttered a few amiable commonplaces and then moved on. The terrace had become very crowded. The little party had found seats near the musicians, and from either side came a hum of voices. A Saxon halted before

them, designating with pointing finger the retreating back of the Prince, his companion, a pinguid woman who looked as though she lived on fish, shouted, "*Herr Jesus! ist es ja möglich,*" and hurried on for a closer view. Near by was a group of Brazilians and among them a pretty girl in a fantastic gown, whose voice was like the murmur of birds. To the left were some Russians conversing in a hard, cruel French. The girl seemed to have interested them. "But why," asked one, "but why is it that she wears such loud colors?" To which another, presumably the wit of the party, answered idly, "Who knows, she may be deaf." And immediately behind Mrs. Incoul were two young Americans, wonderfully well dressed, who were exchanging chaste anecdotes and recalling recent adventures with an accompaniment of smothered laughter that was fathomless in its good-fellowship.

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