

BUCHANAN THOMPSON

MAKING
PEOPLE
HAPPY

Buchanan Thompson
Making People Happy

«Public Domain»

Thompson B.

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Making People Happy

CHAPTER I

The bride hammered the table desperately with her gavel. In vain! The room was in pandemonium.

The lithe and curving form of the girl – for she was only twenty, although already a wife – was tense now as she stood there in her own drawing-room, stoutly battling to bring order out of chaos. Usually the creamy pallor of her cheeks was only most daintily touched with rose: at this moment the crimson of excitement burned fiercely. Usually her eyes of amber were soft and tender: now they were glowing with an indignation that was half-wrath.

Still the bride beat a tattoo of outraged authority with the gavel, wholly without avail. The confusion that reigned in the charming drawing-room of Cicily Hamilton did but grow momentarily the more confounded. The Civitas Club was in full operation, and would brook no restraint. Each of the twelve women, who were ranged in chairs facing the presiding officer, was talking loudly and swiftly and incessantly. None paid the slightest heed to the frantic appeal of the gavel... Then, at last, the harassed bride reached the limit of endurance. She threw the gavel from her angrily, and cried out shrilly above the massed clamor of the other voices:

"If you don't stop," she declared vehemently, "I'll never speak to one of you again!"

That wail of protest was not without its effect. There came a chorus of ejaculations; but the monologues had been efficiently interrupted, and the attention of the garrulous twelve was finally given to the presiding officer. For a moment, silence fell. It was broken by Ruth Howard, a girl with large, soulful brown eyes and a manner of rapt earnestness, who uttered her plaint in a tone of exceeding bitterness:

"And we came together in love!"

At that, Cicily Hamilton forgot her petulance over the tumult, and smiled with the sweetness that was characteristic of her.

"Really, you know," she confessed, almost contritely, "I don't like to lecture you in my own house; but we came together for a serious purpose, and you are just as rude as if you'd merely come to tea."

One of the women in the front row of chairs uttered a crisp cry of approval. This was Mrs. Flynn, a visiting militant suffragette from England. Her aggressive manner and the eager expression of her narrow face with the gleaming black eyes declared that this woman of forty was by nature a fighter who delighted in the fray.

"Yes; Mrs. Hamilton is right," was her caustic comment. "We are forgetting our great work – the emancipation of woman!"

Cicily beamed approval on the speaker; but she inverted the other's phrase:

"Yes," she agreed, "our great work – the subjugation of man!"

The statement was not, however, allowed to go unchallenged. Helen Johnson, who was well along in the twenties at least, and still a spinster, prided herself on her powers of conquest, despite the fact that she had no husband to show for it. So, now, she spoke with an air of languid superiority:

"Oh, we've already accomplished the subjugation of man," she drawled, and smiled complacently.

"Some of us have," Cicily retorted; and the accent on the first word pointed the allusion.

"Oh, hush, dear!" The chiding whisper came from Mrs. Delancy, a gray-haired woman of sixty-five, somewhat inclined to stoutness and having a handsome, kindly face. She was the aunt of Cicily,

and had reared the motherless girl in her New York home. Now, on a visit to her niece, the bride of a year, she found herself inevitably involved in the somewhat turbulent session of the Civitas Club, with which as yet she enjoyed no great amount of sympathy. Her position in the chair nearest the presiding officer gave her opportunity to voice the rebuke without being overheard by anyone save the militant Mrs. Flynn, who smiled covertly.

Cicily bent forward, and spoke softly to her aunt's ear:

"I just had to say it, auntie," she avowed happily. "You know, she tried her hardest to catch Charles."

Mrs. Morton, a middle-aged society woman, who displayed sporadic interest in the cause of woman during the dull season, now rose from the chair immediately behind Mrs. Flynn, and spoke with a tone of great decisiveness:

"Yes, ladies of the Civitas Club, Mrs. Flynn is perfectly right." She indicated the identity of the militant suffragette, who was a stranger to most of those in the company, by a sweeping gesture. "It is our duty to follow firmly on the path which our sister has indicated toward the emancipation of woman. We should get the club started at once, and the work done immediately. Lent will be over soon, and then there will be no time for it."

"Yes, indeed," Cicily agreed enthusiastically, as Mrs. Morton again subsided into her chair; "let's get the club going right away." The presiding officer hesitated for a moment, fumbling among the papers on the table. "What's the name – ? Oh, here it is!" she concluded, lifting a sheet from the litter before her. "Listen! It's the Civitas Society for the Uplift of Woman and for Encouraging the Spread of Social Equality among the Masses."

As this gratifyingly sonorous designation was enunciated by Cicily in her most impressive voice, the members of the club straightened in their places with obvious pride, and there was a burst of hand-clapping. Ruth Howard's great eyes rolled delightedly.

"Oh," she gushed, "isn't it a darling duck of a name! Let's see – the Vivitas Society for – for – what is it for, anyhow?"

Cicily came to the rescue of the forgetful zealot.

"It's for the purpose of bringing men and women closer together," she explained with dignity.

Miss Johnson gushed approval with her usual air of coquettish superiority.

"Oh, read it again, Cicily," she urged. "It's so inspiring!"

"Yes, do read it again," a number of enthusiasts cried in chorus.

The presiding officer was on the point of complying with the demand for a repetition of the sonorous nomenclature:

"The Civitas Society for – " she began, with stately emphasis. But she broke off abruptly, under the impulse of a change in mood. "Oh, what's the use?" she questioned flippantly. "You'll all get copies of it in full in your mail to-morrow morning." Mightily pleased with this labor-saving expedient, Cicily beamed on her fellow club-members. "What next?" she inquired, amiably.

Mrs. Carrington rose to her feet, and addressed the assembly with that dignity befitting one deeply experienced in parliamentary exercises.

"Having voted on the name," she remarked ponderously, evidently undisturbed by the exceedingly informal nature of the voting, if such it could be called, "I think it is now time for us to start the society." She stared condescendingly through her lorgnette at the duly impressed company, and sank back into her chair.

There were many exclamations of assent to Mrs. Carrington's timely proposal, and much nodding of heads. Plainly, the ladies were minded to start the society forthwith. Unhappily, however, there remained an obstacle to the accomplishment of that desirable end – a somewhat general ignorance as to the proper method of procedure. Ruth Howard turned the gaze of her large brown eyes wistfully on Mrs. Carrington, and voiced the dilemma by a question:

"How do we start?" she asked, in a tone of gentle wonder.

Before Mrs. Carrington could formulate a reply to this pertinent interrogation, the militant suffragette from England began an oration.

"The start of a great movement such as is this," Mrs. Flynn declaimed, "is like unto the start of a great race, or the start of a noble sport; it is like –"

Cicily was so enthusiastic over this explanation that she interrupted the speaker in order to demonstrate the fact that she understood the matter perfectly.

"You mean," she exclaimed joyously, "that you blow a whistle, or shoot a pistol!"

This appalling ignorance of parliamentary tactics induced some of the more learned to ill-concealed titters; Miss Johnson permitted herself to laugh in a gurgling note that she affected. But it was Mrs. Carrington who took it on herself to utter a veiled rebuke.

"I fear Mrs. Hamilton has not been a member of many clubs," she remarked, icily.

At Miss Johnson's open flouting, Cicily had flushed painfully. Now, however, she was ready with a retort to Mrs. Carrington's implied criticism:

"Oh, on the contrary!" she exclaimed. "Why, I was chief rooter of the Pi Iota Gammas, when I went to boarding-school at Briarcliff."

Miss Johnson spoke with dangerous suavity of manner:

"Then, my dear, since you were one of the Pigs – pardon my using the English of it, but I never could pronounce those Greek letters –"

"Of course not," Cicily interrupted, with her sweetest smile. "I remember, Helen, dear: you had no chance to practise, not having belonged at Briarcliff."

Kindly Mrs. Delancy was on nettles during the passage of the gently spoken, but none the less acrimonious, remarks between her niece and Miss Johnson. She was well aware of Cicily's deep-seated aversion for the coquettish older woman, who had not scrupled to employ all her arts to win away another's lover. That she had failed utterly in her efforts to make an impression on the heart of Charles Hamilton did not mitigate the offense in the estimation of the bride. So strong was Cicily's feeling, indeed, and so impulsive her temperament, that the aunt was really alarmed for fear of an open rupture between the two young women, for Helen Johnson had a venomous tongue, and a liking for its employment. So, now, Mrs. Delancy hastened to break off a conversation that threatened disaster.

"Let us select the officers, the first thing," she suggested, rising for the sake of effectiveness in securing attention to herself. "It is, I believe, usual in clubs to have officers, and, for that reason, it seems to me that it would be well to select officers for this club, here and now." Mrs. Delancy reseated herself, well satisfied with her effort, for there was a general buzz of interest among her auditors.

Cicily, with the lively change of moods that was distinctive of her, was instantly smiling again, but now with sincerity. Without a moment of hesitation, she accepted the suggestion, and acted upon it. She turned toward Mrs. Carrington, and addressed her words to that dignified person:

"Yes, indeed," she declared gladly, "I accept the suggestion... Won't you be president, Mrs. Carrington?"

The important lady was obviously delighted by this suggestion. She smiled radiantly, and she fairly preened herself so that the spangles on her black gown shone proudly.

"Thank you, my dear Mrs. Hamilton," she replied tenderly, with a pretense of humility that failed completely. "But I believe there are certain formalities that are ordinarily observed – I believe that it is a matter of selection by the club as a whole. Of course, if –" She paused expectantly, and regarded those about her with a smile that was weighted with suggestion.

Cicily was somewhat perturbed by the error into which she had fallen. It occurred to her that Helen Johnson might here find another opportunity for the gratification of malice. A glance showed that this detestable young woman was in fact exchanging pitying glances with Mrs. Flynn. Cicily was flushed with chagrin, as she spoke falteringly, with an apologetic inflection:

"Oh, the president has to be elected? I beg your pardon! I thought it was like the army, and – went by age."

At this unfortunate explanation, the simper of gratified vanity on Mrs. Carrington's features vanished as if by magic. She stiffened visibly, as she acridly ejaculated a single word:

"Really!" The inflection was scathing.

Mrs. Flynn, who was smiling complacently over the evident confusion of Cicily, now stood up to instruct that unhappy presiding officer:

"No, indeed, Mrs. Hamilton," she announced with great earnestness, "for the most part, it is the young women, even young wives no older than yourself oftentimes, who are at the front, fighting gloriously the battle of all women in this great movement... At least, that is the way in England." She paused and bridled as she surveyed the attentive company, her manner full of self-content. "There, I may say, the youngest and the most beautiful women have been the leaders in the fray. Ahem!"

Cicily did not hesitate to remove all ambiguity from the utterance of the militant suffragette with the sallow, narrow face.

"And you were a great leader, were you not, Mrs. Flynn?" she demanded, bluntly.

There were covert smiles from the other women; but the Englishwoman was frankly gratified by the implication. She was smiling with pleasure as she answered:

"I may say truthfully that I know the inside of almost every police-station in London."

At this startling announcement, uttered with every appearance of pride, the suffragette's hearers displayed their amazement by exclamations and gestures. Mrs. Carrington especially made manifest the fact that she had scant patience with this manner of martyrdom in the cause of woman's emancipation.

"My dear Mrs. Flynn," she said, with a hint of contempt in her voice, "here in America, we do not think that getting into jail is necessarily a cause for pride." There were murmurs of assent from most of the others; but Mrs. Flynn herself was in no wise daunted.

"Well, then, it should be," she retorted, briskly. "Zeal is the watchword!"

"I think that Mrs. Flynn should be president," Miss Johnson cried with sudden enthusiasm. "She has suffered in the cause!"

"Oh, for that matter," interjected Mrs. Morton flippantly, "most of us are married." It was known to all those whom she addressed, save perhaps the Englishwoman, that at the age of forty Mrs. Morton had undergone two divorces, and that she was now living wretchedly with a third husband, so she spoke with the authority of one having had sufficient experience.

But Mrs. Flynn was too much interested in her own harrowing experiences to be diverted by cynical raillery.

"The last time I went to jail," she related, "I had chained myself to the gallery in the House of Commons, and, when they tried to release me, I bit a policeman – hard!"

"Oh, you man-eater!" It was Cicily who uttered the exclamation, half-reproachfully, half-banteringly.

"I fail to see why, if one should prefer even Chicago roast beef to an Irish policeman, that should be held against one." This was Mrs. Carrington's indignant comment on the narrative of the mordant martyr.

The remark affected Mrs. Flynn, however, in a fashion totally unexpected. She cried out in genuine horror and disgust over the suggested idea.

"Good heavens! Do you imagine I would ever bite an Irish policeman?"

"If not," Mrs. Carrington rejoined slyly, "you will have very small opportunity in New York for the exercise of your very peculiar talents."

Cicily interposed a remark concerning the appetizing charms of some of the mounted policemen. It seemed to her that the conversation between the two older women had reached a point where interruption were the course of prudence. "I think we had better do some more business, now," she added hastily, with an appealing glance toward her aunt.

Mrs. Delancy rose to the emergency on the instant.

"By all means," she urged. "Let us get on with the business. We haven't been going ahead very fast, it seems to me. Why not elect the officers right away?"

Once again, the entire company became agog with interest over the project of securing duly authorized officials. There were murmured conversations, confidential whisperings. As Ruth Howard earnestly declared, it was so exciting – a real election. A stealthy canvas of candidates was in full swing. The names of Mrs. Flynn and of Mrs. Carrington were heard oftenest. Incidentally, certain sentences threw light on individual methods of determining executive merit. A prim spinster shook her head violently over some suggestion from the woman beside her. "No, my dear," she replied aggressively, "I certainly shall not vote for her – vote for a woman who wears a transformation? No, indeed!"... Cicily improved the interval of general bustle to inquire secretly of her aunt as to the possible shininess of her nose. "It always gets shiny when I get excited," she explained, ruefully. As a matter of fact, there was nothing whatever the matter with that dainty feature, which had a fascination all its own by reason of the fact that one was forever wondering whether it was classically straight or up-tilted just the least infinitesimal fraction.

It was Mrs. Morton who first took energetic action toward an election. She stood up, and spoke with a tone of finality:

"I think that dear Mrs. Carrington would make a splendid officer. I nominate dear Mrs. Carrington for our president."

"Did you hear that, Mrs. Carrington?" Cicily inquired, with a pleased smile for the one thus honored. "You're nominated."

"Oh, it's so thrilling!" Ruth Howard exclaimed, with irrepressible enthusiasm.

But Miss Johnson, to whom Ruth particularly addressed herself, had on occasion been unmercifully snubbed by Mrs. Carrington. In consequence, now, she showed no sign of sympathy with her companion's emotion. On the contrary, she sniffed indignantly, and muttered something about "that woman!"

Meantime, Mrs. Morton was waxing restless over the fact that things remained at a standstill, despite the nomination she had made. She rose to her feet, and surveyed the company with a glance eloquent of haughty surprise.

"I am waiting for a second to my motion," she remarked, icily. Then, as there was no audible response to this information, she added with rising indignation: "Well, really!" There was a wealth of contemptuous reproach in the tone.

The effect on the susceptible Cicily was instantaneous. With her customary impulsiveness, and her eagerness to do the right thing for any and all persons, she felt that she herself had been woefully remiss in not having hurried to Mrs. Morton's support at once. So, to make amends, she spoke with vivacity:

"Oh, I second it!.. Mrs. Carrington," she continued, turning to the gratified candidate, "you're seconded." She was rewarded for her conduct by a stately bow of thanks from Mrs. Morton. Half a dozen others, taking their cue from the presiding officer, noisily cried out in seconding the candidacy of Mrs. Carrington, whereat Mrs. Morton grew flushed with pleasure, and was moved to consummate the affair without a moment's delay.

"I move that the election of Mrs. Carrington as president be now made, and also that the election be made unanimous," she demanded, with much unction in her voice. She smiled persuasively at the presiding officer as she concluded: "Won't you put that motion, my dear?"

Cicily rose to the occasion with an access of becoming dignity.

"It is moved and seconded," she announced loudly, "that Mrs. Carrington be elected president of this club. All in favor of this motion – "

"One moment, please," Miss Johnson interrupted, excitedly. "Madam Chairman, I move that Mrs. Flynn, the great, the tried, the proven, the trusted crusader in the cause of women, from England,

be elected president, and that her election be made unanimous." She paused to turn to Ruth, whom she addressed in a fierce whisper: "If you don't second me, I'll never speak to you again."

"Oh, I second you," Ruth cried, anxiously. "Of course, I second you."

But, by this time, Cicily had come to a realization of the fact that the other women present were every whit as ignorant of parliamentary law as was she herself. So, in this emergency, she did not scruple to make audacious retort. She answered with exceeding blandness:

"But, you see, Miss Johnson, there's already a motion before the house."

Thereupon, Mrs. Morton hastened valiantly to her own support.

"Yes, indeed," she declared, haughtily; "my motion was first. I must insist that it be voted upon. If Miss Johnson wished to have an imported English president for our American society, she should have nominated Mrs. Flynn first." She made direct appeal to the presiding officer. "Am I not right, dear?"

Cicily beamed on Mrs. Morton, and was about to reply, when a sudden thought came to her that did greater credit to her ingenuity than to her executive knowledge. Forthwith, she beamed, somewhat hypocritically, on Miss Johnson in turn.

"Yes, certainly," she affirmed; "I'm sure you're both quite right."

"Thank you, Madam Chairman, for agreeing with me," Miss Johnson replied, placated by Cicily's unexpected amiability toward her. "My motion also is before the house, and I insist that it be voted on. Mrs. Flynn has been seconded."

There was a spirit of hostility in the manner with which Miss Johnson and Mrs. Morton faced each other that boded ill for peace. The rival candidates sat in rigid erectness, disdainfully aloof while their supporters wrangled. The whisperings of the others suggested a growing acrimoniousness of debate. That earnest maiden, Ruth, was alarmed by the tension of strife.

"I think I'd rather go," she faltered. "I'm afraid you're going to quarrel, Helen."

But the resources of Cicily's inspiration were by no means ended. She waved a conciliatory hand toward the adversaries, and spoke with an air of finality that produced an instantaneous effect as of oil on troubled waters.

"I'll tell you: I'll put one motion, and the other can be an amendment." At this profound suggestion, the whole company breathed a sigh of relief. Only Ruth appeared somewhat puzzled.

"What's an amendment?" she questioned frankly, while the others regarded her with evident scorn for such ignorance.

"An amendment, Ruth," the presiding officer explained patiently, "is – is – oh, just listen, and don't interrupt the proceedings, and you'll know all about it in a few minutes." She beamed once again, first on Mrs. Morton and then on Miss Johnson. "Which of you would rather be the amendment?" she inquired.

Mrs. Morton, as became her years, was first to make reply.

"It's entirely immaterial to me, just so my motion is put."

Miss Johnson adopted a manner that was not without signs of heroic self-sacrifice.

"I'll be the amendment," were her words. With that, she bowed very formally to Mrs. Morton, who returned the salute with a fine dignity, after which the two at last subsided into their chairs.

Cicily was elated with the subtle manner in which she had evolved order out of chaos. Her eyes glowed with pride, and the flush in her cheeks deepened. There was an added music in her voice, as she once more addressed the company.

"Splendid!" she ejaculated. "Now, all in favor of Mrs. Motion's motion – I mean Mrs. Morton's motion, please say ay!"

In a clear, ringing voice she led the chorus in the affirmative. Yes, every woman present, including the presiding officer, voted an enthusiastic ay, whereupon Cicily declared the motion carried; and Mrs. Morton rose and said: "Thank you, ladies." Next, Mrs. Carrington stood up, placed a hand on her heart, and expressed her appreciation of the honor done her: "I deeply thank you,

ladies." The incident was fittingly concluded by an outburst of applause in which all the club joined, although Ruth beat her palms in rather a bewildered manner... Cicily immediately entered on the new phase of the situation.

"Now, all in favor of Miss Johnson's amendment, please say ay," she directed. Again, she led the chorus in the affirmative, and the entire company joined in the vote without a dissenting voice. "Amendment carried," the presiding officer announced, gleefully. It was now the turn of Miss Johnson to rise and offer her thanks, and Mrs. Flynn followed, saying, very neatly: "From over the sea, I thank you." The usual applause was of the heartiest... But Cicily was still energetic.

"Now, all in favor of the motion and of the amendment, please say ay," she requested. For the third time, she led the chorus, and the vote was unopposedly affirmative. "The motion and the amendment are carried unanimously," Cicily announced, and the hand clapping sounded a happy content on the part of the Civitas Club.

Afterward, came a little intermission of conversation in which was expressed much appreciation of the efficiency of the club in carrying on its session. "It all goes to show how businesslike women can be," Mrs. Carrington remarked, triumphantly. Mrs. Flynn was even more emphatic. "I've never seen a meeting more gloriously typical of our great cause." The tribute was welcomed with a buzz of assent... But, finally, there came a lull in the talking. It was broken by Mrs. Delancy, who spoke thoughtlessly out of a confused mind, with no suspicion as to the sinister effect to be wrought by her words:

"Who's elected?" was her simple question.

There was a moment of amazed silence, in which the members of the club stared at one another with widened eyes. It was broken very speedily, however, by Mrs. Carrington, who rose to her feet with more activity of movement than was customary to her dignified bearing.

"I have the honor," she stated, sharply.

Instantly, Mrs. Flynn, the militant suffragette, was up, her face belligerent.

"Pardon me, but the honor belongs to me," she snapped, regarding the first claimant with a fierce indignation that was returned in kind. Most of the others were too confounded for speech, but Mrs. Morton rose to support her candidate's claims.

"Pray pardon me," she began placatingly, "but probably Mrs. Flynn does not understand. The interpretation of parliamentary law in England may be quite different. Probably, it is. The customs of that country vary widely from ours in many respects. So, they probably do in the matter of elections in clubs. Now, I belong to ten clubs – American clubs – and I assure you that, according to the parliamentary law in every one of those ten clubs, Mrs. Carrington is certainly elected."

This advocacy was, naturally, a challenge to Miss Johnson, who promptly rose up to champion her own candidate.

"Mrs. Carrington, I am sure, has no desire to take advantage of a distinguished stranger within our gates – and one who has served as gloriously in the cause as Mrs. Flynn – but, even if someone – " she regarded Mrs. Morton with great significance – "I say, even if someone should wish to take unfair advantage of a technicality, it would be altogether impossible, for my amendment to the original motion was carried – unanimously! Mrs. Flynn is the president of the club, duly elected."

Some hazy notion of parliamentary procedure moved Mrs. Flynn to a suggestion.

"I think the matter might best be settled by the chair," she said, doubtfully. "The chair put the motion. Let us then leave the decision to Madam Chairman." Mrs. Carrington nodded a stately agreement to the proposal, and the company as a whole appeared vastly relieved, with the exceptions of Miss Johnson, who sniffed defiantly, and of Ruth, who appeared more than ever bewildered by the succession of events.

Now, at last, Cicily felt herself baffled by the crisis of her own making. She looked from one to another with reproach in her amber eyes.

"But – but you cannot expect me to decide between my guests," she espostulated. There was appeal for relief in the pathetic droop of the scarlet lips of the bride, but it was of no avail. The company asserted with vehemence that she must render the decision in this unfortunate dilemma... And, again, the angel of inspiration whispered a solution of the difficulty. Impulsive as ever, a radiant smile curved her mouth, and her eyes shone happily.

"Very well," she yielded. "Since you insist on putting your hostess in such an unfortunate position, I decide that it is up to the ladies themselves. Which one wishes to take the office, to force herself forward against the wishes of the other?" She cast a seemingly guileless glance of inquiry first on Mrs. Carrington, then on Mrs. Flynn, who simultaneously uttered exclamations of indignation at the imputation thus laid upon them.

Mrs. Carrington was quick to make explicit answer.

"If the ladies of the club do not desire me to be president, I must decline to accept the office, in spite of a unanimous vote. If, however – " She broke off to stare accusingly at her rival, then about the room in search of encouragement for her claims.

Mrs. Flynn took advantage of the opportunity for speech in her own behalf.

"Naturally, as a stranger, I hesitate to force myself forward, even though my record is such that it is hard to see how any opposition could possibly develop against me. However – "

"Of course, Mrs. Carrington is elected," Mrs. Morton interrupted.

At the same time, Miss Johnson urged aggressiveness on her candidate.

"Don't back down," she implored. "Remember the policeman!"

Mrs. Carrington muttered maliciously, as she caught the words.

"In view of Mrs. Flynn's record," she began, "I scarcely feel justified – " Her mock humility was copied by Mrs. Flynn on the instant.

"As a stranger, I cannot force myself – "

The presiding officer decided that this was in truth the psychological moment in which to dominate the situation.

"Indeed, the chair appreciates the rare quality of your self-denial," she announced in an authoritative voice that commanded the respectful attention of all. "Now, ladies," she continued with an air of grave rebuke, "you see what comes of putting your hostess in such an unfortunate position as compelling her to force on one of her guests something she doesn't want. Mrs. Carrington and Mrs. Flynn, both, are my friends and my guests as well, and I must certainly decline to embarrass them further in this matter. The only thing I can do, since neither of them is willing to take the presidency, is regretfully to accept it myself. So, I will be president, and I do now so declare myself."

At this astounding decision, Mrs. Carrington and Mrs. Flynn sank down in their chairs, too dumfounded to protest: but their distress, along with the similar emotion of Mrs. Morton and Miss Johnson, was not observed by the others in the general hubbub of enthusiasm aroused by the new Solomon come to judgment. After an interval of tumultuous cheering, there came demand for a speech by the newly fledged president... Cicily acceded, after due urging.

"I'm ever so much obliged to you," she declared, and kissed her hands gracefully to her fellow club-members. Thereat, the applause was of the briskest. "Really, I am," she made assurance, and wafted another kiss. On this occasion, the applause was of even greater volume than ever before, although four of those present did not join in the ovation to the new chief executive. "Yes, really – truly!" Cicily went on, fluently. "And I think this is a wonderful club we have started. We need a club. It gives us – us married women – something to do. That's the real answer – the real cause, I think, of the woman question. These men have gone on inventing vacuum cleaners and gas-stoves and apartment hotels and servants that know more than we do. They haven't treated us fairly. They've taken away all our occupation, and now we've got to retaliate. We can't keep house for them any more, and, if we – if we care anything about them, or want to help them, we've got to go into business, or to help them vote... Well, they brought it on themselves. They've got too proud. They used to be

dependent on us: now, we're dependent on them, on their inventions and their servants. So, we're going to show them. We'll make them dependent on us in the wider outside world, just as they used to be dependent on us in the home. They've hurt our pride, and we're going to make them pay. They say we are nervous and reckless and always on the go... It's their fault: they've made the new woman, and now we are going to make the new man. They put us out of work, and made us so, and now they're going to be sorry... The time is fast coming when each of us will have at least three or four men – "

It was Miss Johnson who caused the interruption to this burst of eloquence.

"Why, that's positively immoral!" gasped the outraged spinster.

" – at least three or four men dependent upon her," concluded the unabashed president of the Civitas Club, as she cast a withering look on her enemy, who quailed visibly. "And I think that's all," Cicily added, contentedly. She felt that she could with justice claim to have conducted herself nobly throughout a critical situation.

"I move that we adjourn," said Mrs. Flynn, energetically. Her vigorous temperament would permit no longer sulking in silence despite the humiliation to which she had so recently been subjected.

Mrs. Carrington, however, had not yet rejected all hope of office.

"We must first select a secretary," she suggested.

This was opposed by Miss Johnson, always persistently moved to discredit the older woman who had snubbed her socially.

"Why not select a professional stenographer as a member of the club; then make her secretary? Any number of young working women would doubtless be glad of the honor." This brought an outcry against the admission of any professional working woman into the exclusive Civitas.

"Oh, remember that we have ideals!" Ruth Howard remonstrated, with sincere, if vague, adherence to her ideals; and she up-turned her great eyes toward the ceiling.

Mrs. Flynn, curiously enough, was opposed to the idealist in this instance.

"Yes," she said, "I fear that it's quite true. The professional working woman thinks more of her salary and a comfortable living than of our great cause."

Cicily herself disposed of the matter with a blithesome nonchalance that was beautiful to behold.

"Oh, don't bother," was her way of cutting the Gordian knot. "I'll make my husband's stenographer do the work."

"I move that we adjourn," the militant suffragette repeated in a most businesslike manner.

Mrs. Carrington was determined that her rival should not outdistance her at the finish. She spoke with her most forcible dignity:

"I second the motion."

The motion was put and carried... Thus ended the first session of that epoch-marking organization: The Civitas Society for the Uplift of Woman and for Encouraging the Spread of Social Equality among the Masses.

CHAPTER II

Cicily Hamilton, bride of a year, was seemingly as fortunate a young woman as the city of New York could offer to an envious world. Her house in the East Sixties, just off the Avenue, was a charming home, dainty, luxurious, in the best of taste, with a certain individuality in its arrangement and ornamentation that spoke agreeably of the personality of its mistress. Her husband, Charles Hamilton, was a handsome man of twenty-six, who adored his wife, although recently, in the months since the waning of the honeymoon, he had been so absorbed in business cares that he had rather neglected those acts of tenderness so vital to a woman's happiness. Some difficulties that disturbed him downtown rendered him often preoccupied when at home, and the effect on his wife was unwholesome. Little by little, the girl-woman felt a certain discontent growing within her, indeterminate in a great measure, but none the less forceful in its influence on her moods day by day.

The statements that Cicily had made in her inaugural speech to the Civitas Society exhibited, albeit crudely, some of the facts breeding revolt in her. In very truth, she found herself without sufficient occupation to hold her thoughts from fanciful flights that led to no satisfactory result in action. An excellent housekeeper, who was far wiser in matters of ménage than she could ever be, held admirable sway over the domestic machinery. The servants, thus directed, were as those untroubling inventions of which she had complained. Since she was not devoted to the distraction of social gaieties, Cicily found an appalling amount, of unemployed time on her hands. She was blest with an excellent education; but, with no great fondness for knowledge as such, she was not inclined to prosecute any particular study with the ardor of the scholar. To rid herself of the boredom induced by this state of affairs, the young wife decided that she must develop a new interest in her fellow creatures. She went farther, and resolved to establish herself on a basis of equality with her husband, not merely in love, but in the sterner world of business. Thus, she was brought to entertain a convincing belief in equality for the sexes, in society and in the home.

She revealed something of her mind and heart to her aunt on the afternoon of the day following the singular session of the Civitas Society. The two women were together in Cicily's boudoir, a delightful room, all paneled in rose silk, with furniture *Louis Quatorze*, and Dresden ornaments... It was an hour yet before time for the dressing-bell. Cicily, in a negligee of white silk that fitted well with the color scheme of the room and that only emphasized the purity of her ivory skin, suddenly sat up erect in the chair where she had been nestling in curving abandonment.

"Why, Aunt Emma," she exclaimed, with a new sparkle in the amber eyes, "we forgot to set any date for another meeting of the club?"

But Mrs. Delancy did not seem impressed by the oversight.

"Do you think it makes any real difference, dear?" she questioned placidly.

At this taunt, Cicily assumed an air of reproach that was hardly calculated to deceive the astute old lady, who had known the girl for twenty years.

"Don't you take our club seriously?" she questioned in her turn. Her musical voice was touchingly plaintive.

"Oh, it's serious enough," was the retort. "It's either seriously pitiful, or pitifully serious, whichever way you choose to look at it."

Cicily abandoned her disguise of concern, and laughed heartily before she spoke again.

"I must admit that I think it's a joke, myself," she admitted: "more's the pity." There was a note of genuine regret in her voice now. Then, she smiled again, with much zest. "But it was so amusing – stirring them up, and then calmly taking the presidency myself, because none of them knew just how to stop me!"

"It was barefaced robbery!" Mrs. Delancy exclaimed reprovingly, although she, too, was compelled to smile at the audacity of the achievement. "But," she added meditatively, "I really don't see what it all amounts to, anyhow?"

"I suspect that you didn't listen attentively to the president's speech," Cicily railed.

"I listened," Mrs. Delancy declared, firmly. "In spite of that fact, my dear, what does it all mean? Down deep, are you serious in some things I have heard you say, lately?"

"Oh, yes, I'm serious enough," was the answer, spoken with a hint of bitterness in the tone. "That is, I'm seriously bored – desperately bored, for the matter of that. I tell you, Aunt Emma, a married woman must have something to do. As for me, why, I have absolutely nothing to do. Those other women, too, or at least most of them, have nothing to do, and they are all desperately bored. Well, that's the cause of the new club. Unfortunately, the club, too, has nothing to do – nothing at all – and so, the club, too, is desperately bored... Oh, if only I could give that club an object – a real object!"

Mrs. Delancy murmured some remonstrance over the new enthusiasm that sounded in her niece's voice while uttering the aspiration in behalf of the Civitas Society; but the bride paid no heed.

"Yes," she mused, straightening the arches of her brows in a frown of perplexity, "it could be made something, with an object. I myself could be made something, with an object – something worth while to strive for... Heavens, how I wish I had something to do!"

This iconoclastic fashion of speech was not patiently endured by the orthodox aunt, who listened to the plaint with marked displeasure.

"A bride with a young husband and a beautiful home," she remarked tartly, "seeking something to do! In my day, a bride was about the busiest and the happiest person in the community." Her voice took on a tone of tender reminiscence, and a little color crept into the wrinkled pallor of her cheeks, and she perked her head a bit coquettishly, in a youthful manner not unbecoming, as she continued: "I remember how happy – oh, how happy! – I was then!"

Cicily, however, displayed a rather shocking lack of sympathy for this emotion on the part of her relative. She was, in fact, selfishly absorbed in her own concerns, after the manner of human nature, whether young or old.

"Yes," she said, almost spitefully, "I have noticed how always old married ladies continually remember the happy time when they were brides. A bride's happy time is as much advertised as a successful soap... But I – I – well, I'm not a bride any longer – that's all. I've been married a whole year!"

"A whole year!" Mrs. Delancy spoke the word with the fine scorn of one who was looking forward complacently to the celebration of a golden wedding anniversary in the near future.

Cicily, however, was impervious to the sarcasm of the repetition.

"Yes," she repeated gloomily, "a whole year. Think of it... And all the women in my family live to be seventy. Mamma would have been alive if she hadn't been drowned. A good many live to be eighty. Why, you're not seventy yet. Poor dear! You may have ten or a dozen more years of it!"

Mrs. Delancy was actually horrified by her niece's commiseration.

"Cicily," she eluded, "you must not speak in that manner. I've been happily married. You – " The afflicted bride was not to be turned aside from her woe.

"I'm perfectly wretched," she announced, fiercely. "Auntie, Charles is a bigamist!"

"Good Lord!" Mrs. Delancy ejaculated with pious fervor, and sank back limply in her chair, too much overcome for further utterance. Then, in a flash of memory, she beheld again the facts as she had known them as to her niece's courtship and marriage. The girl and Charles Hamilton had been sweethearts as children. The boy had developed into the man without ever apparently wavering in his one allegiance. Cicily, too, had had eyes for no other suitor, even when many flocked about her, drawn by the fascination of her vivacious beauty and the little graces of her form and the varied brilliance of her moods. It was because of the steadfastness of the two lovers in their devotion that Mr. and Mrs. Delancy had permitted themselves to be persuaded into granting consent for an early

marriage. It had seemed to them that the constancy of the pair was sufficiently established. They believed that here was indeed material for the making of an ideal union. Their belief seemed justified by the facts in the outcome, for bride and groom showed all the evidences of rapturous happiness in their union. It had only been revealed during this present visit to the household by the aunt that, somehow, things were not as they should be between these two erstwhile so fond... And now, at last, the truth was revealed in all its revolting nudity. Mrs. Delancy recalled, with new understanding of its fatal significance, the aloof manner recently worn by the young husband in his home. So, this was the ghastly explanation of the change: The man was a bigamist! The distraught woman had hardly ears for the words her niece was speaking.

"Yes," Cicily said, after a long, mournful pause, "besides me, Charles has married – " She paused, one foot in a dainty satin slipper beating angrily on the white fur of the rug.

"What woman?" Mrs. Delancy demanded, with wrathful curiosity.

"Oh, a factory full of them!" The young wife spoke the accusation with a world of bitterness in her voice.

"Good gracious, what an extraordinary man!" Mrs. Delancy, under the stimulus of this outrageous guilt again sat erect in her chair. Once more, the flush showed daintily in the withered cheeks; but, now, there was no hint of tenderness in the rose – it was the red of anger. "I know how you must feel, dear," she said, gently. "I was jealous once, of one woman. But to be jealous of a factory full – oh, Lord!"

"Yes," Cicily declared, in tremulous tones, "all of them, and the men besides!"

Mrs. Delancy bounced from her seat, then slowly subsided into the depths of the easy chair, whence she fairly gaped at her former ward. When, finally, she spoke, it was slowly, with full conviction.

"Cicily, you're crazy!"

"No," the girl protested, sadly; "only heartbroken. I am so miserable that I wish I were dead!"

"But, my dear," Mrs. Delancy argued, "it can't be that you are quite – er – sensible, you know."

"Of course, I'm not sensible," Cicily admitted, petulantly. "I said I was jealous, didn't I? Naturally, I can't be sensible."

"But Charles can't be married to the men, too!" Mrs. Delancy asserted, wonderingly.

At that, Cicily flared in a burst of genuine anger.

"Yes, he is, too," she stormed; "and to the women, too – to the buildings, to the machinery, to the nasty ground, to the fire-escapes – to every single thing about that horrid business of his! Oh, I hate it! I hate it! I hate every one of them!.. And he is a bigamist, I tell you – yes, a bigamist! He's married to me and to his business, too, and he cares more for his business!"

"Humph!" The exclamation came from Mrs. Delancy with much energy. It was surcharged, with relief, for the tragedy was made clear to her at last. Surely, there was room for trouble in the situation, but nothing like that over which she had shuddered during the period of her misapprehension. In the first minute of relief, she felt aroused to indignation against her niece who had so needlessly shocked her. "I do wish, Cicily," she remonstrated, "that you would endeavor to curb your impetuosity. It leads you into such absurdities of speech and of action. Your extravagant way of opening this subject caused me utterly to mistake your meaning, and set me all a-tremble – for a tempest in a teapot."

"I think I'll get a divorce," Cicily declared, defiantly. The bride was not in an apologetic mood, inasmuch, as she regarded herself as the one undeservedly suffering under great wrongs.

"Perhaps!" Mrs. Delancy retorted, sarcastically. Her usual good humor was returning, after the first reaction from the stress she had undergone by reason of the young wife's fantastic mode of speech. "I suppose you will name Charles's business as the co-respondent."

"It takes more out of him than any woman could," was the spirited retort. "Of course, I shall. Why not?"

Mrs. Delancy, now thoroughly amused, explained to her niece some details concerning the grounds required by the statutes in the state of New York for the granting of absolute divorce, of which hitherto the carefully nurtured girl had been in total ignorance. Cicily was at first astounded, and then dismayed. But, in the end, she regained her poise, and reverted with earnestness to the need of reform in the courts where such gross injustice could be. She surmised even that in this field she might find ultimately some outlet of a satisfactory sort for her wasted energies.

"Why, I and my club, and other clubs like it," she concluded, "find the cause of our being in such things as this. We women haven't any occupation, and we haven't any husbands, essentially speaking – and we're determined to have both."

The bold declaration was offensive to the old lady's sense of propriety.

"You can't interfere with your husband's business, Cicily," she said by way of rebuke, somewhat stiffly.

The young wife, however, was emancipated from such admonitions. She did not hesitate to express her dissent boldly.

"Yes," she exclaimed indignantly, "that's the idea that you old married women have been putting up with, without ever whimpering. Why, you've even been preaching it yourselves – preaching it until you've spoilt the men utterly. So, now, thanks to your namby-pamby knuckling under always, it's business first, last, and all the time – and marriage just nowhere. I tell you, it's all wrong... I know you're older," she went on vehemently, as Mrs. Delancy's lips parted. "I guess that's why you're wrong... Anyhow, it isn't as it was intended. For the matter of that, which was first, marriage or business? Did Adam have a business when he married? Huh! There! No man could answer that!" Cicily paused in triumph, and, in the elation wrought by developing a successful argument, turned luminous eyes on her aunt, while her red lips bent into the daintiest of smiles.

Mrs. Delancy was not to be beguiled from the fixed habits of thoughts carried through scores of years by the winsome blandishments of her whilom ward. She had no answering gentleness for the gladness in the girl's face. When she spoke, it was with an emphasis of acute disapproval:

"Do you mean that you are going to make your husband choose between you and his business, Cicily?"

Something in the tone disturbed the young wife's serenity. The direct question itself was sufficient to destroy the momentary equanimity evolved out of a mental achievement such as the argument from Adam. She realized, on the instant, that her desire must be defeated by the facts of life.

"No," she admitted, after a brief period of hesitancy, "of course not. Charles chooses business first – any man would."

The inexorable question followed:

"Well, what are you going to do?" Then, as no answer came: "I beg of you, Cicily, not to be rash. Don't do anything that will cause you regret after you have come into a calmer mood. Of course, once on a time, marriage was first with men, and I think that it should be first now – I know that it should. But it is the truth that business has now come to be first in the lives of our American men. And, my dear, you can't overcome conditions all by yourself. At heart, Charles loves you, Cicily. I'm sure of that, even though he does seem, wrapt up in his business affairs. Yet, he loves you, just the same. That's the one thing we older women learn to cling to, to solace ourselves with: that, deep down in their hearts, our husbands do love us, no matter how indifferent they may seem. When a woman once loses faith in that, why, she just can't go on, that's all. Oh, I beg you, Cicily, don't ever lose that faith. It means shipwreck!"

The young wife shook her head slowly – doubtfully; then quickly – determinedly.

"No, I won't put up with just that," she asserted, morosely, "I want more. I'll have more, or –" She checked herself abruptly, and once again the arch of her dark brows was straightened, as she mused somberly over her future course.

There fell an interval of silence, in which the two reflected on the mysteries that lie between man and woman in the way of love. It was broken finally by Mrs. Delancy, who spoke meditatively, hardly conscious that the words were uttered aloud.

"Of course, you're not really dependent on Charles. Your own fortune – "

The girl's interruption came in a passionate outburst that filled her hearer with distress and surprise. It would seem that Cicily had been thinking very tenderly, yet very unhappily, of those mysteries of love.

"But I am dependent on him – dependent on him for every ray of sunshine in my heart, for every breath of happiness in my life; while he – " her voice broke suddenly; it came muffled as she continued quiveringly – "while he – he's not dependent on me at all!" After a little interval, she went on, more firmly, but with the voice of despair. "That's the pity of it. That's what makes us women nowadays turn to something else – to some other man, or to some work, some fad, some hobby, some folly, some madness – anything to fill the void in our hearts that our husbands forget to fill, because their whole attention is concentrated on business... But I'm not going to be that wife, I give you warning. I'm going to make my husband fill all my heart, and, too, I'm going to make him dependent on me. I'll make him know that he can't do without me!"

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Delancy objected, incredulously. "Why, as to that, Charles is dependent on you now. You haven't really lost his love – not a bit of it, my dear!"

There was infinite sadness in the young wife's gesture of negation.

"Aunt Emma," she said earnestly, "Charles and I haven't had an evening together in weeks. We haven't had a real old talk in months... Why, I – I doubt if he even remembers what day this is!"

"You mean – ?"

"Our first anniversary! Long ago, we planned to celebrate the day – just the theater and a little supper after – only us two... I wonder if he will remember." The tremulous voice gave evidence that the tears were very near.

"Oh, of course, he will," Mrs. Delancy declared briskly, with a manner of cheerful certainty. Nevertheless, out of the years of experience in the world of married folk, a great doubt lurked in her heart.

Cicily's head with the coronal of dark brown hair, usually poised so proudly, now drooped dejectedly; there was no hopefulness in her tones as she replied:

"I don't know – I am afraid. Why, since the tobacco trust bought out that Carrington box factory five months ago, and began fighting Charles, he talks tobacco boxes in his sleep."

"Don't take it so seriously," the aunt argued. "All men are that way. My dear, your Uncle Jim mumbles woolens – even during Dog Days. No, you mustn't take things so seriously, Cicily. You are not the only wife who has to suffer in this way. You are not the only one who was ever lonesome. Your case isn't unusual – more pity! It's the case of almost every wife whose husband wins in this frightful battle with business. Years ago, dear, I suffered as you are suffering. Your uncle never told me anything. I've never known anything at all about more than half of his life. He rebuffed me the few times at first, when I tried to share those things with him. He said that a woman had no place in a man's business affairs. So, after a little, I stopped trying. For a time, I was lonesome – very lonesome – oh, so lonesome!.. And, then, I began to make a life for myself outside the home – as he had already by his business. I tried in my humble way to do something for others. That's the best way to down a heartache, my dear – try making someone else happy."

The words arrested Cicily's heed. As their meaning seeped into her consciousness, the expression of her face changed little by little. "Making people happy!" She repeated the phrase as she had formulated the idea again, very softly, with a persistence that would have surprised Mrs. Delancy, could she have caught the inaudible murmur. Presently, the faint rose in the pallor of her cheeks blossomed to a deeper red, and the amber eyes grew radiant, as she lifted the long, curving

lashes, and fixed her gaze on her aunt. There was a new animation in her voice as she spoke; there was a new determination in the resolute set of the scarlet lips.

"Why, that's something to do!" she exclaimed, joyously. "It's something to do, really, after all – isn't it?"

"Yes," her aunt agreed, sedately; "something big to do. For my part, I joined church circles, and worked first for the heathen."

"Oh, bother the heathen!" Cicily ejaculated, rudely. "Charles is heathen enough for me!" With her characteristic impulsiveness, she sprang to her feet, as Mrs. Delancy quietly rose to go, ran to her aunt, and embraced that astonished woman with great fervor.

"I honestly believe that you've given me the idea I was looking for," she declared enthusiastically. "You darling!.. Making people happy! It would be something for the club, too... Yes," she concluded decisively, "I'll do it!"

"Do what?" Mrs. Delancy questioned, bewildered by the swift succession of moods in the girl she loved, yet could never quite understand.

"You just wait, Aunt Emma," was the baffling answer.

Mrs. Delancy turned at the door, and spoke grimly:

"My dear Cicily," she said, "you're getting to be quite as reticent as your uncle and Charles."

But the girl disdained any retort to the gibe. Instead, she was saying softly, over and over: "Making other people happy! Making other people happy!"

CHAPTER III

Cicily Hamilton was inclined to be captious with her maid as she dressed that evening. She was finical to the point of absurdity even, which is often the fault of beauty, and perhaps a fault not altogether unbecoming, since its aim is the last elaboration of loveliness. Indeed, the fault becomes a virtue, when its motive lies in the desire to attain supreme charm for the one beloved. It was so with the young wife to-night. She was filled with anxious longing to display her beauty in its full measure for the pleasuring of the man to whom she had given her whole heart. For that fond purpose, she was curt with her maid, and reproachful with herself. She was deeply troubled by the thought that a darker shade to her brows might enhance the brilliance of her eyes. She hesitated before, but finally resisted, a temptation to use a touch of pencil to gain the effect. She was exceedingly querulous over the coiling of her tresses into the crown that added so regally to the dignity of her bearing. The selection of the gown was a matter for profound deliberation, and ended in a mood of dubiety. That passed, however, when at last she surveyed her length in the cheval glass. Then, she became aware, beyond peradventure of doubt, that the white lacery of silk, molded to her slender form and interwoven with heavy threads of gold, was supremely becoming. The gleam of precious metal in the fabric scorned to transmute the amber of her eyes into a glory of gold. The pearls of her necklace harmonized with the warm pallor of her complexion.

Despite the pains taken, there remained time to spare before the dinner hour, when the toilette had been thus happily completed. As she was about to dismiss the maid, Cicily bethought her to ask a question.

"Has Mr. Hamilton come in yet, Albine?"

"Yes, madam – a half-hour ago. He went to the study, with his secretary."

Left alone, Cicily mused on the maid's information, and bitterness again swept over her. During the period of dressing, she had been so absorbed in the attempt to make the most of her charms that, for the time being, she had forgotten her apprehensions as to her husband's neglect. Now, however, those apprehensions were recalled, and they became more poignant. Only a stern regard for the appearance she must present anon held her back from tears. It seemed to her longing a dreadful thing that on this day of all others her husband must bring back to his home this rival of whom she was so jealous. For it could mean nothing else, if he were closeted with his secretary at this hour: he was dallying in the embraces of business, with never a thought for the wife whom he had sworn to love always. For all that she was beautiful, possessed of ample fortune, married to the man of her choice and, by reason of her youth, full of the joy of life, Cicily Hamilton was a very wretched woman, as she strolled slowly down the broad, winding stair, and entered the drawing-room, where already Mrs. Delancy was waiting.

That good lady, in her turn, had found herself sorely perturbed. The mood of revolt in which her niece was, caused a measure of alarm in the bosom of the loving older woman. Her own course at this moment was not clear to her. She had been aware that to-day was the first anniversary of the marriage of the Hamiltons, and it was on this account that she had prolonged her visit. Yet, she had meant to go away in time to permit the young pair their particular fête in a *solitude à deux*. She, too, however, had learned of the present absorption of Mr. Hamilton in business affairs, and there at she became suspicious that her niece's fears as to his forgetfulness might be realized. In the end, she had determined to remain until immediately before the dinner hour, leaving the going or staying to be ruled by the facts as they developed. Arrived at this decision, she had telephoned to her own home as to the uncertainty in regard to her movements, and thereafter had awaited the issue of events with that simple placidity which is the boon sometimes granted by much experience of the world.

Hardly a moment after the meeting of the two women in the drawing-room, the master of the house entered hurriedly, bearing in his hand a sheaf of papers. Charles Hamilton was a large, dark

man, remarkably good-looking in a boyish, clean-shaven, typically American, businesslike fashion. Still short of the thirties, he had nevertheless formed those habits of urgent industry that characterize the successful in the metropolis. Already, he had become enslaved by the business man's worst habit – that most dangerous to domestic happiness – the taking of mutual love between him and his wife as something conceded once for all, not requiring exhibition or culture or protection or nourishment of any sort. In this mistake he was perhaps less blamable than are some, inasmuch as he was fettered by a great ignorance of feminine nature. From earliest boyhood, he had been Cicily's abject worshiper. That devotion had held him aloof from other women. In consequence, he had missed the variety of experiences through which many men pass, from which, perforce, they garner stores of wisdom, to be used for good or ill as may be. Hamilton, unfortunately, knew nothing concerning woman's foibles. He had no least suspicion as to her constant craving for the expression of affection, her heart-hunger for the murmured words of endearment, her poignant yearning for gentle, tender caresses day by day. They loved; they were safely married: those blessed facts to him were sufficient. There was no need to talk about it. In fact, in his estimation, there was not time. There was business to be managed – no dillydallying in this day and generation, unless one would join the down-and-out club! Such was the point of view from which this bridegroom of a year surveyed his domestic life. It was a point of view established almost of necessity from the environment in which he found himself established. He was in no wise unique: he was typical of his class. He was clean and wholesome, industrious, energetic, clever – but he knew nothing of woman... So, now, he immediately rushed up to Mrs. Delancy, without so much as a glance toward the wife who had studied long and anxiously to make the delight of his eyes.

"Hello, Aunt Emma!" he exclaimed gaily, and kissed her. "I am glad you stayed over to cheer up the little girl, while husband was away grubbing the money for her."

"Oh, do you think, then, that she needs cheering?" There was a world of significance in the manner with which the old lady put the pertinent question; but the absorbed business man was deaf to the implication.

Cicily, however, spared him the pains of any disclaimer by uttering one for herself.

"Need cheering! – I! What an absurd idea!"

Hamilton smiled gladly as he heard his wife speak thus bravely in assurance of her entire contentment. Now, for the first time, he turned toward her. But it was plain that he failed to note her appearance with any degree of particularity. He had no phrase of appreciation for the exquisite woman, in the exquisite gown. He spoke with a certain tone of fondness; yet it was the fondness of habit.

"That's right," he said heartily, as he crossed the room to her side, and bestowed a perfunctory marital peck on the oval cheek. "I'm mighty glad you haven't been lonesome, sweetheart."

"You were thinking that I might be lonesome?" There was a note of wistfulness in the musical voice as she asked the question. The glow in the golden eyes uplifted to his held a shy hint of hope.

Manlike, he failed to understand the subtle appeal.

"Of course, I didn't," he replied. "If I thought about it at all – which I greatly doubt, we've been so rushed at the office – I probably thought how glad you must be not having a man under foot around the house when your friends called for gossip. Oh, I understand the sex; I know how you women sit about and talk scandal."

An indignant humph! from Mrs. Delancy was ignored by Hamilton, but he could not escape feeling a suggestion of sarcasm in his wife's deliberately uttered comment:

"Yes, Charles, you do know an awful lot about women!"

"I knew enough to get you," he riposted, neatly. Then, he had an inspiration that he believed to be his duty as a host: as a matter of fact, it was rudeness in a husband toward his wife on the first anniversary of their marriage. He turned suavely to Mrs. Delancy. "You'll stay to dinner, of course,

Aunt Emma." And he added, fatuously: "You and Cicily can chat together afterward, you know... I've a horrible pile of work to get through to-night."

At her husband's unconscious betrayal of her dearest hopes, Cicily started as if she had been struck. As he ceased speaking, she nerved herself to the ordeal, and made her statement with an air as casual as she could muster, while secretly a-quiver with anxiety.

"Why, Charles, we are going to the theater to-night, you know."

"To-night?" Hamilton spoke the single word with an air of blank astonishment. It needed no more to make clear the fact that he had no guess as to the importance of this especial day in the calendar of their wedded lives.

Cicily's spirits sank to the lowest deeps of discouragement before this confession of her husband's inadvertence to that which she regarded as of vital import in the scheme of happiness.

"Yes," she answered dully, "to-night. I have the tickets. Don't you remember what day this is?" She strove to make her tone one of the most casual inquiry, but the attempt was miserably futile before the urge of her emotion.

"Why, to-day is Thursday, of course," Hamilton declared, with an ingenuous nonchalance that was maddening to the distraught wife.

"Yes, it is Thursday," she rejoined; and now there was no mistaking the bitter feeling that welled in the words. "It is the anniversary of our wedding day."

Hamilton caught his unhappy bride in his arms. He was all contrition in this first moment when his delinquency was brought home to consciousness. He kissed her tenderly on the brow.

"By Jove, I'm awfully sorry, dear." There was genuine regret for such culpable carelessness in his voice. "How ever did I forget it?" He drew her closer in his embrace for a brief caress. Then, after a little, his natural buoyancy reasserted itself, and he spoke with a mischievousness that would, he hoped, serve to stimulate the neglected bride toward cheerfulness. "I say," he demanded, "did you remember it all by yourself, sweetheart, or did Aunt Emma remind you? I know she's a great sharp on all the family dates."

The badinage seemed in the worst possible taste to the watching Mrs. Delancy, but she forbore comment, although she saw her niece wince visibly. Cicily's pride, however, came to her rescue, and she contrived to restrain herself from any revelation of her hurt that could make itself perceptible to Hamilton, who now released her from his arms.

"Oh," she said with an assumption of lightness, "Aunt Emma told me, of course. How in the world could you suppose that I, in my busy life, could possibly remember a little thing like the anniversary of our wedding?"

"No, naturally you wouldn't," the husband agreed, in all seriousness. "Gad! If you hadn't been so engrossed with that wonderful club and all your busy society doings, you probably would have remembered, and then you would have told me."

The young wife perceived that it would be impossible to arouse him to any just realization of the flagrancy of his fault. Yet, she dared venture a forlorn hope that all was not yet lost.

"Well, anyhow, Charles," she said, very gently, "I have got the tickets, and it is our anniversary."

"Even if I had remembered about it," was the answer, spoken with a quickly assumed air of abstraction, as business returned to his thoughts, "I couldn't have gone to-night. You see, I have a conference on – very important. It means a great deal. Morton and Carrington are coming around to see me... I can't bother you with details, but you know it must be important. I can't get out of it, anyhow."

"But, Charles – " The voice was very tender, very persuasive. It moved Hamilton to contrition. The pleading accents could never have been resisted by any lover; but by a husband – ah, there is a tremendous difference, as most wives learn. Hamilton merely elaborated his defense against yielding to his wife's wishes.

"I tell you, Cicily, it's a matter of business – business of the biggest importance to me. You're my wife, dear: you don't want to interfere with my business, do you? Why, I'll leave it to Aunt Emma here, if I'm not right." He faced about toward Mrs. Delancy, with an air of triumphant appeal. "Come, Aunt Emma, what would you and Uncle Jim do in such a case?"

"I think Cicily already knows the answer to that question," was the neutral reply, with which Hamilton was wholly satisfied.

Now, indeed, the girl abandoned her last faint hope. The magnitude of the failure shook her to the depths of her being. She felt her muscles relax, even as her spirit seemed to grow limp within her. She was in an agony of fear lest she collapse there under the eyes of the man who had so spurned her adoration. Under the spur of that fear, she moved forward a little way toward the window, the while Hamilton chatted on amiably with Mrs. Delancy, continuing to justify the position he had taken. As he paused finally, Cicily had regained sufficient self-control to speak in a voice that told him nothing beyond the bare significance of the words themselves.

"Oh, of course, you're right, Charles. Don't bother any more about it. Attend to your conference, and be happy. There will be plenty more anniversaries!"

CHAPTER IV

The preliminary conference with Morton and Carrington, which had so fatally interfered with Cicily's anniversary plans, proved totally unsatisfactory from the standpoint of Charles Hamilton. As a matter of fact, a crisis had arisen in his business affairs. He was threatened with disaster, and as yet he was unable to see clearly any way out. He was one of countless individuals marked for a tidbit to glut the gormandizing of a trust. He had by no means turned craven as yet; he was resolved to hold fast to his business until the last possible moment, but he could not blind himself to the fact that his ultimate yielding seemed inevitable.

In circumstances such as these, it was natural enough that Hamilton should appear more than ever distraught in his own home, for he found himself wholly unable to cast out of his mind the cares that harassed him. They were ever present during his waking moments; they pursued him in the hours devoted to slumber: his nights were a riot of financial nightmares. He was polite to his wife, and even loverlike with the set phrases and gestures and caresses of habit. Beyond that, he paid her no attention at all. His consuming interest left no room for tender concerns. He had no time for social recreations, for the theater, or functions, or informal visits to friends in Cicily's company. His dark face grew gloomy as the days passed. The faint creases between the eyebrows deepened into something that gave warning of an habitual frown not far away in the future, which would mar the boyish handsomeness of his face. The firm jaw had advanced a trifle, set in a steadfast defiance against the fate that menaced. His speech was brusquer.

Cicily, already in a state of revolt against the conditions of her life, was stimulated to carry out the ideas nebulously forming in her alert brain. She felt that the present manner of living must soon prove unendurable to her. It was essential that a change should be made, and that speedily, for she was aware of the limitations to her own patience. Her temperament was not one to let her sit down in sackcloth and ashes to weep over the ruins of romance. Rather, she would bestir herself to create a new sphere of activity, wherein she might find happiness in some other guise. Yet, despite the ingenuity of her mind, she could not for some time determine on the precise course of procedure that should promise success to her aspirations. Primarily, her desire was to work out some alteration in the status of all concerned by which the domestic ideal might be maintained in all its splendid integrity. But her tentative efforts in this direction, made lightly in order that their purport might not be guessed by the husband, were destined to ignominious failure. Mrs. Delancy, a week after the melancholy anniversary occasion, made mention of the fact that she had cautiously spoken to Charles in reference to his neglect of the young wife. She explained that his manner of reply convinced her that, in reality, the man was merely a bit too deeply occupied for the moment, and that, when the temporary pressure had passed, everything would again be idyllic. Mrs. Delancy's motive in telling her niece of the interview was to convince this depressed person that the matter was, after all, of only trifling importance. In this, however, she failed signally. Cicily regarded the incident as yet another evidence of a developing situation that must be checked quickly, or never. But she took advantage of the circumstances to introduce the topic with Hamilton. To her, the conversation was momentous, although neither by word nor by manner did she let her husband suspect that the discussion was aught beyond the casual.

As usual now, Hamilton, on his return at night from the office, had shut himself in the library, and was busily poring over a bundle of papers, when there came a timid knock at the door. In response to his call, Cicily entered. The young man greeted his wife politely enough, and even called her "darling" in a meaningless tone of voice; but the frown did not relax, and constantly his eyes wandered to the bundle of documents. Cicily, however, was not to be daunted, for his manner was no worse than she had expected. She crossed to a chair that faced his, and seated herself. When, finally, she spoke, it was with an air of tender solicitude, and the smile on her scarlet lips was gently maternal.

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