

STEPHEN LEACOCK

WINSOME WINNIE AND
OTHER NEW NONSENSE
NOVELS

Stephen Leacock

**Winsome Winnie and
other New Nonsense Novels**

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Stephen Leacock
Winsome Winnie and
other New Nonsense Novels

I
WINSOME WINNIE OR, TRIAL AND TEMPTATION

(Narrated after the best models of 1875)

CHAPTER I

THROWN ON THE WORLD

"Miss Winnifred," said the Old Lawyer, looking keenly over and through his shaggy eyebrows at the fair young creature seated before him, "you are this morning twenty-one."

Winnifred Clair raised her deep mourning veil, lowered her eyes and folded her hands.

"This morning," continued Mr. Bonehead, "my guardianship is at an end."

There was a tone of something like emotion in the voice of the stern old lawyer, while for a moment his eye glistened with something like a tear which he hastened to remove with something like a handkerchief. "I have therefore sent for you," he went on, "to render you an account of my trust."

He heaved a sigh at her, and then, reaching out his hand, he pulled the woollen bell-rope up and down several times.

An aged clerk appeared.

"Did the bell ring?" he asked.

"I think it did," said the Lawyer. "Be good enough, Atkinson, to fetch me the papers of the estate of the late Major Clair defunct."

"I have them here," said the clerk, and he laid upon the table a bundle of faded blue papers, and withdrew.

"Miss Winnifred," resumed the Old Lawyer, "I will now proceed to give you an account of the disposition that has been made of your property. This first document refers to the sum of two thousand pounds left to you by your great uncle. It is lost."

Winnifred bowed.

"Pray give me your best attention and I will endeavour to explain to you how I lost it."

"Oh, sir," cried Winnifred, "I am only a poor girl unskilled in the ways of the world, and knowing nothing but music and French; I fear that the details of business are beyond my grasp. But if it is lost, I gather that it is gone."

"It is," said Mr. Bonehead. "I lost it in a marginal option in an undeveloped oil company. I suppose that means nothing to you."

"Alas," sighed Winnifred, "nothing."

"Very good," resumed the Lawyer. "Here next we have a statement in regard to the thousand pounds left you under the will of your maternal grandmother. I lost it at Monte Carlo. But I need not fatigue you with the details."

"Pray spare them," cried the girl.

"This final item relates to the sum of fifteen hundred pounds placed in trust for you by your uncle. I lost it on a horse race. That horse," added the Old Lawyer with rising excitement, "ought to have won. He was coming down the stretch like blue—but there, there, my dear, you must forgive me if the recollection of it still stirs me to anger. Suffice it to say the horse fell. I have kept for your inspection the score card of the race, and the betting tickets. You will find everything in order."

"Sir," said Winnifred, as Mr. Bonehead proceeded to fold up his papers, "I am but a poor inadequate girl, a mere child in business, but tell me, I pray, what is left to me of the money that you have managed?"

"Nothing," said the Lawyer. "Everything is gone. And I regret to say, Miss Clair, that it is my painful duty to convey to you a further disclosure of a distressing nature. It concerns your birth."

"Just Heaven!" cried Winnifred, with a woman's quick intuition. "Does it concern my father?"

"It does, Miss Clair. Your father was not your father."

"Oh, sir," exclaimed Winnifred. "My poor mother! How she must have suffered!"

"Your mother was not your mother," said the Old Lawyer gravely. "Nay, nay, do not question me. There is a dark secret about your birth."

"Alas," said Winnifred, wringing her hands, "I am, then, alone in the world and penniless."

"You are," said Mr. Bonehead, deeply moved. "You are, unfortunately, thrown upon the world. But, if you ever find yourself in a position where you need help and advice, do not scruple to come to me. Especially," he added, "for advice. And meantime let me ask you in what way do you propose to earn your livelihood?"

"I have my needle," said Winnifred.

"Let me see it," said the Lawyer.

Winnifred showed it to him.

"I fear," said Mr. Bonehead, shaking his head, "you will not do much with that."

Then he rang the bell again.

"Atkinson," he said, "take Miss Clair out and throw her on the world."

CHAPTER II

A RENCOUNTER

As Winnifred Clair passed down the stairway leading from the Lawyer's office, a figure appeared before her in the corridor, blocking the way. It was that of a tall, aristocratic-looking man, whose features wore that peculiarly saturnine appearance seen only in the English nobility. The face, while entirely gentlemanly in its general aspect, was stamped with all the worst passions of mankind.

Had the innocent girl but known it, the face was that of Lord Wynchgate, one of the most contemptible of the greater nobility of Britain, and the figure was his too.

"Ha!" exclaimed the dissolute Aristocrat, "whom have we here? Stay, pretty one, and let me see the fair countenance that I divine behind your veil."

"Sir," said Winnifred, drawing herself up proudly, "let me pass, I pray."

"Not so," cried Wynchgate, reaching out and seizing his intended victim by the wrist, "not till I have at least seen the colour of those eyes and imprinted a kiss upon those fair lips."

With a brutal laugh, he drew the struggling girl towards him.

In another moment the aristocratic villain would have succeeded in lifting the veil of the unhappy girl, when suddenly a ringing voice cried, "Hold! stop! desist! begone! lay to! cut it out!"

With these words a tall, athletic young man, attracted doubtless by the girl's cries, leapt into the corridor from the street without. His figure was that, more or less, of a Greek god, while his face, although at the moment inflamed with anger, was of an entirely moral and permissible configuration.

"Save me! save me!" cried Winnifred.

"I will," cried the Stranger, rushing towards Lord Wynchgate with uplifted cane.

But the cowardly Aristocrat did not await the onslaught of the unknown.

"You shall yet be mine!" he hissed in Winnifred's ear, and, releasing his grasp, he rushed with a bound past the rescuer into the street.

"Oh, sir," said Winnifred, clasping her hands and falling on her knees in gratitude. "I am only a poor inadequate girl, but if the prayers of one who can offer naught but her prayers to her benefactor can avail to the advantage of one who appears to have every conceivable advantage already, let him know that they are his."

"Nay," said the stranger, as he aided the blushing girl to rise, "kneel not to me, I beseech. If I have done aught to deserve the gratitude of one who, whoever she is, will remain for ever present as a bright memory in the breast of one in whose breast such memories are all too few, he is all too richly repaid. If she does that, he is blessed indeed."

"She does. He is!" cried Winnifred, deeply moved. "Here on her knees she blesses him. And now," she added, "we must part. Seek not to follow me. One who has aided a poor girl in the hour of need will respect her wish when she tells him that, alone and buffeted by the world, her one prayer is that he will leave her."

"He will!" cried the Unknown. "He will. He does."

"Leave me, yes, leave me," exclaimed Winnifred.

"I will," said the Unknown.

"Do, do," sobbed the distraught girl. "Yet stay, one moment more. Let she, who has received so much from her benefactor, at least know his name."

"He cannot! He must not!" exclaimed the Indistinguishable. "His birth is such—but enough!"

He tore his hand from the girl's detaining clasp and rushed forth from the place.

Winnifred Clair was alone.

CHAPTER III

FRIENDS IN DISTRESS

Winnifred was now in the humblest lodgings in the humblest part of London. A simple bedroom and sitting-room sufficed for her wants. Here she sat on her trunk, bravely planning for the future.

"Miss Clair," said the Landlady, knocking at the door, "do try to eat something. You must keep up your health. See, I've brought you a kippered herring."

Winnifred ate the herring, her heart filled with gratitude. With renewed strength she sallied forth on the street to resume her vain search for employment. For two weeks now Winnifred Clair had sought employment even of the humblest character. At various dress-making establishments she had offered, to no purpose, the services of her needle. They had looked at it and refused it.

In vain she had offered to various editors and publishers the use of her pen. They had examined it coldly and refused it.

She had tried fruitlessly to obtain a position of trust. The various banks and trust companies to which she had applied declined her services. In vain she had advertised in the newspapers offering to take sole charge of a little girl. No one would give her one.

Her slender stock of money which she had in her purse on leaving Mr. Bonehead's office was almost consumed.

Each night the unhappy girl returned to her lodging exhausted with disappointment and fatigue. Yet even in her adversity she was not altogether friendless.

Each evening, on her return home, a soft tap was heard at the door.

"Miss Clair," said the voice of the Landlady, "I have brought you a fried egg. Eat it. You must keep up your strength."

Then one morning a terrible temptation had risen before her.

"Miss Clair," said the manager of an agency to which she had applied, "I am glad to be able at last to make you a definite offer of employment. Are you prepared to go upon the stage?"

The stage!

A flush of shame and indignation swept over the girl. Had it come to this? Little versed in the world as Winnifred was, she knew but too well the horror, the iniquity, the depth of degradation implied in the word.

"Yes," continued the agent, "I have a letter here asking me to recommend a young lady of suitable refinement to play the part of Eliza in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Will you accept?"

"Sir," said Winnifred proudly, "answer me first this question fairly. If I go upon the stage, can I, as Eliza, remain as innocent, as simple as I am now?"

"You can not," said the manager.

"Then, sir," said Winnifred, rising from her chair, "let me say this. Your offer is doubtless intended to be kind. Coming from the class you do, and inspired by the ideas you are, you no doubt mean well. But let a poor girl, friendless and alone, tell you that rather than accept such a degradation she will die."

"Very good," said the manager.

"I go forth," cried Winnifred, "to perish."

"All right," said the manager.

The door closed behind her. Winnifred Clair, once more upon the street, sank down upon the steps of the building in a swoon.

But at this very juncture Providence, which always watches over the innocent and defenceless, was keeping its eye direct upon Winnifred.

At that very moment when our heroine sank fainting upon the doorstep, a handsome equipage, drawn by two superb black steeds, happened to pass along the street.

Its appearance and character proclaimed it at once to be one of those vehicles in which only the superior classes of the exclusive aristocracy are privileged to ride. Its sides were emblazoned with escutcheons, insignia and other paraphernalia. The large gilt coronet that appeared up its panelling, surmounted by a bunch of huckleberries, quartered in a field of potatoes, indicated that its possessor was, at least, of the rank of marquis. A coachman and two grooms rode in front, while two footmen, seated in the boot, or box at the rear, contrived, by the immobility of their attitude and the melancholy of their faces, to inspire the scene with an exclusive and aristocratic grandeur.

The occupants of the equipage—for we refuse to count the menials as being such—were two in number, a lady and gentleman, both of advanced years. Their snow-white hair and benign countenances indicated that they belonged to that rare class of beings to whom rank and wealth are but an incentive to nobler things. A gentle philanthropy played all over their faces, and their eyes sought eagerly in the passing scene of the humble street for new objects of benefaction.

Those acquainted with the countenances of the aristocracy would have recognized at once in the occupants of the equipage the Marquis of Muddlenut and his spouse, the Marchioness.

It was the eye of the Marchioness which first detected the form of Winnifred Clair upon the doorstep.

"Hold! pause! stop!" she cried, in lively agitation.

The horses were at once pulled in, the brakes applied to the wheels, and with the aid of a powerful lever, operated by three of the menials, the carriage was brought to a standstill.

"See! Look!" cried the Marchioness. "She has fainted. Quick, William, your flask. Let us hasten to her aid."

In another moment the noble lady was bending over the prostrate form of Winnifred Clair, and pouring brandy between her lips.

Winnifred opened her eyes. "Where am I?" she asked feebly.

"She speaks!" cried the Marchioness. "Give her another flaskful."

After the second flask the girl sat up.

"Tell me," she cried, clasping her hands, "what has happened? Where am I?"

"With friends!" answered the Marchioness. "But do not essay to speak. Drink this. You must husband your strength. Meantime, let us drive you to your home."

Winnifred was lifted tenderly by the men-servants into the aristocratic equipage. The brake was unset, the lever reversed, and the carriage thrown again into motion.

On the way Winnifred, at the solicitation of the Marchioness, related her story.

"My poor child!" exclaimed the lady, "how you must have suffered. Thank Heaven it is over now. To-morrow we shall call for you and bring you away with us to Muddlenut Chase."

Alas, could she but have known it, before the morrow should dawn, worse dangers still were in store for our heroine. But what these dangers were, we must reserve for another chapter.

CHAPTER IV

A GAMBLING PARTY IN ST. JAMES'S CLOSE

We must now ask our readers to shift the scene—if they don't mind doing this for us—to the apartments of the Earl of Wynchgate in St. James's Close. The hour is nine o'clock in the evening, and the picture before us is one of revelry and dissipation so characteristic of the nobility of England. The atmosphere of the room is thick with blue Havana smoke such as is used by the nobility, while on the green baize table a litter of counters and cards, in which aces, kings, and even two spots are heaped in confusion, proclaim the reckless nature of the play.

Seated about the table are six men, dressed in the height of fashion, each with collar and white necktie and broad white shirt, their faces stamped with all, or nearly all, of the baser passions of mankind.

Lord Wynchgate—for he it was who sat at the head of the table—rose with an oath, and flung his cards upon the table.

All turned and looked at him, with an oath. "Curse it, Dogwood," he exclaimed, with another oath, to the man who sat beside him. "Take the money. I play no more to-night. My luck is out."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Lord Dogwood, with a third oath, "your mind is not on the cards. Who is the latest young beauty, pray, who so absorbs you? I hear a whisper in town of a certain misadventure of yours—"

"Dogwood," said Wynchgate, clenching his fist, "have a care, man, or you shall measure the length of my sword."

Both noblemen faced each other, their hands upon their swords.

"My lords, my lords!" pleaded a distinguished-looking man of more advanced years, who sat at one side of the table, and in whose features the habitués of diplomatic circles would have recognized the handsome lineaments of the Marquis of Frogwater, British Ambassador to Siam, "let us have no quarrelling. Come, Wynchgate, come, Dogwood," he continued, with a mild oath, "put up your swords. It were a shame to waste time in private quarrelling. They may be needed all too soon in Cochin China, or, for the matter of that," he added sadly, "in Cambodia or in Dutch Guinea."

"Frogwater," said young Lord Dogwood, with a generous flush, "I was wrong. Wynchgate, your hand."

The two noblemen shook hands.

"My friends," said Lord Wynchgate, "in asking you to abandon our game, I had an end in view. I ask your help in an affair of the heart."

"Ha! excellent!" exclaimed the five noblemen. "We are with you heart and soul."

"I propose this night," continued Wynchgate, "with your help, to carry off a young girl, a female!"

"An abduction!" exclaimed the Ambassador somewhat sternly. "Wynchgate, I cannot countenance this."

"Mistake me not," said the Earl, "I intend to abduct her. But I propose nothing dishonourable. It is my firm resolve to offer her marriage."

"Then," said Lord Frogwater, "I am with you."

"Gentlemen," concluded Wynchgate, "all is ready. The coach is below. I have provided masks, pistols, and black cloaks. Follow me."

A few moments later, a coach, with the blinds drawn, in which were six noblemen armed to the teeth, might have been seen, were it not for the darkness, approaching the humble lodging in which Winnifred Clair was sheltered.

But what it did when it got there, we must leave to another chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE ABDUCTION

The hour was twenty minutes to ten on the evening described in our last chapter.

Winnifred Clair was seated, still fully dressed, at the window of the bedroom, looking out over the great city.

A light tap came at the door.

"If it's a fried egg," called Winnifred softly, "I do not need it. I ate yesterday."

"No," said the voice of the Landlady. "You are wanted below."

"I!" exclaimed Winnifred, "below!"

"You," said the Landlady, "below. A party of gentlemen have called for you."

"Gentlemen," exclaimed Winnifred, putting her hand to her brow in perplexity, "for me! at this late hour! Here! This evening! In this house?"

"Yes," repeated the Landlady, "six gentlemen. They arrived in a closed coach. They are all closely masked and heavily armed. They beg you will descend at once."

"Just Heaven!" cried the Unhappy Girl. "Is it possible that they mean to abduct me?"

"They do," said the Landlady. "They said so!"

"Alas!" cried Winnifred, "I am powerless. Tell them"—she hesitated—"tell them I will be down immediately. Let them not come up. Keep them below on any pretext. Show them an album. Let them look at the goldfish. Anything, but not here! I shall be ready in a moment."

Feverishly she made herself ready. As hastily as possible she removed all traces of tears from her face. She threw about her shoulders an opera cloak, and with a light Venetian scarf half concealed the beauty of her hair and features. "Abducted!" she murmured, "and by six of them! I think she said six. Oh, the horror of it!" A touch of powder to her cheeks and a slight blackening of her eyebrows, and the courageous girl was ready.

Lord Wynchgate and his companions—for they it was, that is to say, they were it—sat below in the sitting-room looking at the albums. "Woman," said Lord Wynchgate to the Landlady, with an oath, "let her hurry up. We have seen enough of these. We can wait no longer."

"I am here," cried a clear voice upon the threshold, and Winnifred stood before them. "My lords, for I divine who you are and wherefore you have come, take me, do your worst with me, but spare, oh, spare this humble companion of my sorrow."

"Right-oh!" said Lord Dogwood, with a brutal laugh.

"Enough," exclaimed Wynchgate, and seizing Winnifred by the waist, he dragged her forth out of the house and out upon the street.

But something in the brutal violence of his behaviour seemed to kindle for the moment a spark of manly feeling, if such there were, in the breasts of his companions.

"Wynchgate," cried young Lord Dogwood, "my mind misgives me. I doubt if this is a gentlemanly thing to do. I'll have no further hand in it."

A chorus of approval from his companions endorsed his utterance. For a moment they hesitated.

"Nay," cried Winnifred, turning to confront the masked faces that stood about her, "go forward with your fell design. I am here. I am helpless. Let no prayers stay your hand. Go to it."

"Have done with this!" cried Wynchgate, with a brutal oath. "Shove her in the coach."

But at the very moment the sound of hurrying footsteps was heard, and a clear, ringing, manly, well-toned, vibrating voice cried, "Hold! Stop! Desist! Have a care, titled villain, or I will strike you to the earth."

A tall aristocratic form bounded out of the darkness.

"Gentlemen," cried Wynchgate, releasing his hold upon the frightened girl, "we are betrayed. Save yourselves. To the coach."

In another instant the six noblemen had leaped into the coach and disappeared down the street. Winnifred, still half inanimate with fright, turned to her rescuer, and saw before her the form and lineaments of the Unknown Stranger, who had thus twice stood between her and disaster. Half fainting, she fell swooning into his arms.

"Dear lady," he exclaimed, "rouse yourself. You are safe. Let me restore you to your home!"

"That voice!" cried Winnifred, resuming consciousness. "It is my benefactor."

She would have swooned again, but the Unknown lifted her bodily up the steps of her home and leant her against the door.

"Farewell," he said, in a voice resonant with gloom.

"Oh, sir!" cried the unhappy girl, "let one who owes so much to one who has saved her in her hour of need at least know his name."

But the stranger, with a mournful gesture of farewell, had disappeared as rapidly as he had come.

But, as to why he had disappeared, we must ask our reader's patience for another chapter.

CHAPTER VI THE UNKNOWN

The scene is now shifted, sideways and forwards, so as to put it at Muddlenut Chase, and to make it a fortnight later than the events related in the last chapter.

Winnifred is now at the Chase as the guest of the Marquis and Marchioness. There her bruised soul finds peace.

The Chase itself was one of those typical country homes which are, or were till yesterday, the glory of England. The approach to the Chase lay through twenty miles of glorious forest, filled with fallow deer and wild bulls. The house itself, dating from the time of the Plantagenets, was surrounded by a moat covered with broad lilies and floating green scum. Magnificent peacocks sunned themselves on the terraces, while from the surrounding shrubberies there rose the soft murmur of doves, pigeons, bats, owls and partridges.

Here sat Winnifred Clair day after day upon the terrace recovering her strength, under the tender solicitude of the Marchioness.

Each day the girl urged upon her noble hostess the necessity of her departure. "Nay," said the Marchioness, with gentle insistence, "stay where you are. Your soul is bruised. You must rest."

"Alas," cried Winnifred, "who am I that I should rest? Alone, despised, buffeted by fate, what right have I to your kindness?"

"Miss Clair," replied the noble lady, "wait till you are stronger. There is something that I wish to say to you."

Then at last, one morning when Winnifred's temperature had fallen to ninety-eight point three, the Marchioness spoke.

"Miss Clair," she said, in a voice which throbbed with emotion, "Winnifred, if I may so call you, Lord Muddlenut and I have formed a plan for your future. It is our dearest wish that you should marry our son."

"Alas," cried Winnifred, while tears rose in her eyes, "it cannot be!"

"Say not so," cried the Marchioness. "Our son, Lord Mordaunt Muddlenut, is young, handsome, all that a girl could desire. After months of wandering he returns to us this morning. It is our dearest wish to see him married and established. We offer you his hand."

"Indeed," replied Winnifred, while her tears fell even more freely, "I seem to requite but ill the kindness that you show. Alas, my heart is no longer in my keeping."

"Where is it?" cried the Marchioness.

"It is another's. One whose very name I do not know holds it in his keeping."

But at this moment a blithe, gladsome step was heard upon the flagstones of the terrace. A manly, ringing voice, which sent a thrill to Winnifred's heart, cried "Mother!" and in another instant Lord Mordaunt Muddlenut, for he it was, had folded the Marchioness to his heart.

Winnifred rose, her heart beating wildly. One glance was enough. The newcomer, Lord Mordaunt, was none other than the Unknown, the Unaccountable, to whose protection she had twice owed her life.

With a wild cry Winnifred Clair leaped across the flagstones of the terrace and fled into the park.

CHAPTER VII

THE PROPOSAL

They stood beneath the great trees of the ancestral park, into which Lord Mordaunt had followed Winnifred at a single bound. All about them was the radiance of early June.

Lord Mordaunt knelt on one knee on the greensward, and with a touch in which respect and reverence were mingled with the deepest and manliest emotion, he took between his finger and thumb the tip of the girl's gloved hand.

"Miss Clair," he uttered, in a voice suffused with the deepest yearning, yet vibrating with the most profound respect, "Miss Clair—Winnifred—hear me, I implore!"

"Alas," cried Winnifred, struggling in vain to disengage the tip of her glove from the impetuous clasp of the young nobleman, "alas, whither can I fly? I do not know my way through the wood, and there are bulls in all directions. I am not used to them! Lord Mordaunt, I implore you, let the tears of one but little skilled in the art of dissimulation—"

"Nay, Winnifred," said the Young Earl, "fly not. Hear me out!"

"Let me fly," begged the unhappy girl.

"You must not fly," pleaded Mordaunt. "Let me first, here upon bended knee, convey to you the expression of a devotion, a love, as ardent and as deep as ever burned in a human heart. Winnifred, be my bride!"

"Oh, sir," sobbed Winnifred, "if the knowledge of a gratitude, a thankfulness from one whose heart will ever treasure as its proudest memory the recollection of one who did for one all that one could have wanted done for one—if this be some poor guerdon, let it suffice. But, alas, my birth, the dark secret of my birth forbids—"

"Nay," cried Mordaunt, leaping now to his feet, "your birth is all right. I have looked into it myself. It is as good—or nearly as good—as my own. Till I knew this, my lips were sealed by duty. While I supposed that you had a lower birth and I an upper, I was bound to silence. But come with me to the house. There is one arrived with me who will explain all."

Hand in hand the lovers, for such they now were, returned to the Chase. There in the great hall the Marquis and the Marchioness were standing ready to greet them.

"My child!" exclaimed the noble lady, as she folded Winnifred to her heart. Then she turned to her son. "Let her know all!" she cried.

Lord Mordaunt stepped across the room to a curtain. He drew it aside, and there stepped forth Mr. Bonehead, the old lawyer who had cast Winnifred upon the world.

"Miss Clair," said the Lawyer, advancing and taking the girl's hand for a moment in a kindly clasp, "the time has come for me to explain all. You are not, you never were, the penniless girl that you suppose. Under the terms of your father's will, I was called upon to act a part and to throw you upon the world. It was my client's wish, and I followed it. I told you, quite truthfully, that I had put part of your money into options in an oil-well. Miss Clair, that well is now producing a million gallons of gasoline a month!"

"A million gallons!" cried Winnifred. "I can never use it."

"Wait till you own a motor-car, Miss Winnifred," said the Lawyer.

"Then I am rich!" exclaimed the bewildered girl.

"Rich beyond your dreams," answered the Lawyer. "Miss Clair, you own in your own right about half of the State of Texas—I think it is in Texas, at any rate either Texas or Rhode Island, or one of those big states in America. More than this, I have invested your property since your father's death so wisely that even after paying the income tax and the property tax, the inheritance tax, the dog tax and the tax on amusements, you will still have one half of one per cent to spend."

Winnifred clasped her hands.

"I knew it all the time," said Lord Mordaunt, drawing the girl to his embrace, "I found it out through this good man."

"We knew it too," said the Marchioness. "Can you forgive us, darling, our little plot for your welfare? Had we not done this Mordaunt might have had to follow you over to America and chase you all around Newport and Narragansett at a fearful expense."

"How can I thank you enough?" cried Winnifred. Then she added eagerly, "And my birth, my descent?"

"It is all right," interjected the Old Lawyer. "It is A 1. Your father, who died before you were born, quite a little time before, belonged to the very highest peerage of Wales. You are descended directly from Claer-ap-Claer, who murdered Owen Glendower. Your mother we are still tracing up. But we have already connected her with Floyd-ap-Floyd, who murdered Prince Llewellyn."

"Oh, sir," cried the grateful girl. "I only hope I may prove worthy of them!"

"One thing more," said Lord Mordaunt, and stepping over to another curtain he drew it aside and there emerged Lord Wynchgate.

He stood before Winnifred, a manly contrition struggling upon features which, but for the evil courses of he who wore them, might have been almost presentable.

"Miss Clair," he said, "I ask your pardon. I tried to carry you off. I never will again. But before we part let me say that my acquaintance with you has made me a better man, broader, bigger and, I hope, deeper."

With a profound bow, Lord Wynchgate took his leave.

CHAPTER VIII

WEDDED AT LAST

Lord Mordaunt and his bride were married forthwith in the parish church of Muddlenut Chase. With Winnifred's money they have drained the moat, rebuilt the Chase, and chased the bulls out of the park. They have six children, so far, and are respected, honoured and revered in the countryside far and wide, over a radius of twenty miles in circumference.

II

JOHN AND I OR, HOW I NEARLY LOST MY HUSBAND

(Narrated after the approved fashion of the best Heart and Home Magazines)

It was after we had been married about two years that I began to feel that I needed more air. Every time I looked at John across the breakfast-table, I felt as if I must have more air, more space.

I seemed to feel as if I had no room to expand. I had begun to ask myself whether I had been wise in marrying John, whether John was really sufficient for my development. I felt cramped and shut in. In spite of myself the question would arise in my mind whether John really understood my nature. He had a way of reading the newspaper, propped up against the sugar-bowl, at breakfast, that somehow made me feel as if things had gone all wrong. It was bitter to realize that the time had come when John could prefer the newspaper to his wife's society.

But perhaps I had better go back and tell the whole miserable story from the beginning.

I shall never forget—I suppose no woman ever does—the evening when John first spoke out his love for me. I had felt for some time past that it was there. Again and again, he seemed about to speak. But somehow his words seemed to fail him. Twice I took him into the very heart of the little wood beside Mother's house, but it was only a small wood, and somehow he slipped out on the other side. "Oh, John," I had said, "how lonely and still it seems in the wood with no one here but ourselves! Do you think," I said, "that the birds have souls?" "I don't know," John answered, "let's get out of this." I was sure that his emotion was too strong for him. "I never feel a bit lonesome where you are, John," I said, as we made our way among the underbrush. "I think we can get out down that little gully," he answered. Then one evening in June after tea I led John down a path beside the house to a little corner behind the garden where there was a stone wall on one side and a high fence right in front of us, and thorn bushes on the other side. There was a little bench in the angle of the wall and the fence, and we sat down on it.

"Minnie," John said, "there's something I meant to say—"

"Oh, John," I cried, and I flung my arms round his neck. It all came with such a flood of surprise.

"All I meant, Minn—" John went on, but I checked him.

"Oh, don't, John, don't say anything more," I said. "It's just too perfect." Then I rose and seized him by the wrist. "Come," I said, "come to Mother," and I rushed him along the path.

As soon as Mother saw us come in hand in hand in this way, she guessed everything. She threw both her arms round John's neck and fairly pinned him against the wall. John tried to speak, but Mother wouldn't let him. "I saw it all along, John," she said. "Don't speak. Don't say a word. I guessed your love for Minn from the very start. I don't know what I shall do without her, John, but she's yours now; take her." Then Mother began to cry and I couldn't help crying too. "Take him to Father," Mother said, and we each took one of John's wrists and took him to Father on the back verandah. As soon as John saw Father he tried to speak again—"I think I ought to say," he began, but Mother stopped him. "Father," she said, "he wants to take our little girl away. He loves her very dearly, Alfred," she said, "and I think it our duty to let her go, no matter how hard it is, and oh, please Heaven, Alfred, he'll treat her well and not misuse her, or beat her," and she began to sob again.

Father got up and took John by the hand and shook it warmly.

"Take her, boy," he said. "She's all yours now, take her."

So John and I were engaged, and in due time our wedding day came and we were married. I remember that for days and days before the wedding day John seemed very nervous and depressed; I

think he was worrying, poor boy, as to whether he could really make me happy and whether he could fill my life as it should be filled. But I told him that he was not to worry, because I *meant* to be happy, and was determined just to make the best of everything.

Father stayed with John a good deal before the wedding day, and on the wedding morning he went and fetched him to the church in a closed carriage and had him there all ready when we came. It was a beautiful day in September, and the church looked just lovely. I had a beautiful gown of white organdie with *tulle* at the throat, and I carried a great bunch of white roses, and Father led John up the aisle after me.

I remember that Mother cried a good deal at the wedding, and told John that he had stolen her darling and that he must never misuse me or beat me. And I remember that the clergyman spoke very severely to John, and told him he hoped he realized the responsibility he was taking and that it was his duty to make me happy. A lot of our old friends were there, and they all spoke quite sharply to John, and all the women kissed me and said they hoped I would never regret what I had done, and I just kept up my spirits by sheer determination, and told them that I had made up my mind to be happy and that I was going to be so.

So presently it was all over and we were driven to the station and got the afternoon train for New York, and when we sat down in the compartment among all our bandboxes and flowers, John said, "Well, thank God, that's over." And I said, "Oh, John, an oath! on our wedding day, an oath!" John said, "I'm sorry, Minn, I didn't mean—" but I said, "Don't, John, don't make it worse. Swear at me if you must, but don't make it harder to bear."

* * * * *

We spent our honeymoon in New York. At first I had thought of going somewhere to the great lonely woods, where I could have walked under the great trees and felt the silence of nature, and where John should have been my Viking and captured me with his spear, and where I should be his and his alone and no other man should share me; and John had said all right. Or else I had planned to go away somewhere to the seashore, where I could have watched the great waves dashing themselves against the rocks. I had told John that he should be my cave man, and should seize me in his arms and carry me whither he would. I felt somehow that for my development I wanted to get as close to nature as ever I could—that my mind seemed to be reaching out for a great emptiness. But I looked over all the hotel and steamship folders I could find and it seemed impossible to get good accommodation, so we came to New York. I had a great deal of shopping to do for our new house, so I could not be much with John, but I felt it was not right to neglect him, so I drove him somewhere in a taxi each morning and called for him again in the evening. One day I took him to the Metropolitan Museum, and another day I left him at the Zoo, and another day at the aquarium. John seemed very happy and quiet among the fishes.

So presently we came back home, and I spent many busy days in fixing and arranging our new house. I had the drawing-room done in blue, and the dining-room all in dark panelled wood, and a boudoir upstairs done in pink and white enamel to match my bedroom and dressing-room. There was a very nice little room in the basement next to the coal cellar that I turned into a "den" for John, so that when he wanted to smoke he could go down there and do it. John seemed to appreciate his den at once, and often would stay down there so long that I had to call to him to come up.

When I look back on those days they seem very bright and happy. But it was not very long before a change came. I began to realize that John was neglecting me. I noticed it at first in small things. I don't know just how long it was after our marriage that John began to read the newspaper at breakfast. At first he would only pick it up and read it in little bits, and only on the front page. I tried not to be hurt at it, and would go on talking just as brightly as I could, without seeming to

notice anything. But presently he went on to reading the inside part of the paper, and then one day he opened up the financial page and folded the paper right back and leant it against the sugar-bowl.

I could not but wonder whether John's love for me was what it had been. Was it cooling? I asked myself. And what was cooling it? It hardly seemed possible, when I looked back to the wild passion with which he had proposed to me on the garden bench, that John's love was waning. But I kept noticing different little things. One day in the spring-time I saw John getting out a lot of fishing tackle from a box and fitting it together. I asked him what he was going to do, and he said that he was going to fish. I went to my room and had a good cry. It seemed dreadful that he could neglect his wife for a few worthless fish.

So I decided to put John to the test. It had been my habit every morning after he put his coat on to go to the office to let John have one kiss, just one weeny kiss, to keep him happy all day. So this day when he was getting ready I bent my head over a big bowl of flowers and pretended not to notice. I think John must have been hurt, as I heard him steal out on tiptoe.

Well, I realized that things had come to a dreadful state, and so I sent over to Mother, and Mother came, and we had a good cry together. I made up my mind to force myself to face things and just to be as bright as ever I could. Mother and I both thought that things would be better if I tried all I could to make something out of John. I have always felt that every woman should make all that she can out of her husband. So I did my best first of all to straighten up John's appearance. I shifted the style of collar he was wearing to a tighter kind that I liked better, and I brushed his hair straight backward instead of forward, which gave him a much more alert look. Mother said that John needed waking up, and so we did all we could to wake him up. Mother came over to stay with me a good deal, and in the evenings we generally had a little music or a game of cards.

About this time another difficulty began to come into my married life, which I suppose I ought to have foreseen—I mean the attentions of other gentlemen. I have always called forth a great deal of admiration in gentlemen, but I have always done my best to act like a lady and to discourage it in every possible way. I had been innocent enough to suppose that this would end with married life, and it gave me a dreadful shock to realize that such was not the case. The first one I noticed was a young man who came to the house, at an hour when John was out, for the purpose, so he said at least, of reading the gas meter. He looked at me in just the boldest way and asked me to show him the way to the cellar. I don't know whether it was a pretext or not, but I just summoned all the courage I had and showed him to the head of the cellar stairs. I had determined that if he tried to carry me down with him I would scream for the servants, but I suppose something in my manner made him desist, and he went alone. When he came up he professed to have read the meter and he left the house quite quietly. But I thought it wiser to say nothing to John of what had happened.

There were others too. There was a young man with large brown eyes who came and said he had been sent to tune the piano. He came on three separate days, and he bent his ear over the keys in such a mournful way that I knew he must have fallen in love with me. On the last day he offered to tune my harp for a dollar extra, but I refused, and when I asked him instead to tune Mother's mandoline he said he didn't know how. Of course I told John nothing of all this.

Then there was Mr. McQueen, who came to the house several times to play cribbage with John. He had been desperately in love with me years before—at least I remember his taking me home from a hockey match once, and what a struggle it was for him not to come into the parlour and see Mother for a few minutes when I asked him; and, though he was married now and with three children, I felt sure when he came to play cribbage with John that it *meant* something. He was very discreet and honourable, and never betrayed himself for a moment, and I acted my part as if there was nothing at all behind. But one night, when he came over to play and John had had to go out, he refused to stay even for an instant. He had got his overshoes off before I told him that John was out, and asked him if he wouldn't come into the parlour and hear Mother play the mandoline, but he just made one dive for his overshoes and was gone. I knew that he didn't dare to trust himself.

Then presently a new trouble came. I began to suspect that John was drinking. I don't mean for a moment that he was drunk, or that he was openly cruel to me. But at times he seemed to act so queerly, and I noticed that one night when by accident I left a bottle of raspberry vinegar on the sideboard overnight, it was all gone in the morning. Two or three times when McQueen and John were to play cribbage, John would fetch home two or three bottles of bevo with him and they would sit sipping all evening.

I think he was drinking bevo by himself, too, though I could never be sure of it. At any rate he often seemed queer and restless in the evenings, and instead of staying in his den he would wander all over the house. Once we heard him—I mean Mother and I and two lady friends who were with us that evening—quite late (after ten o'clock) apparently moving about in the pantry. "John," I called, "is that you?" "Yes, Minn," he answered, quietly enough, I admit. "What are you doing there?" I asked. "Looking for something to eat," he said. "John," I said, "you are forgetting what is due to me as your wife. You were fed at six. Go back."

He went. But yet I felt more and more that his love must be dwindling to make him act as he did. I thought it all over wearily enough and asked myself whether I had done everything I should to hold my husband's love. I had kept him in at nights. I had cut down his smoking. I had stopped his playing cards. What more was there that I could do?

* * * * *

So at last the conviction came to me that I must go away. I felt that I must get away somewhere and think things out. At first I thought of Palm Beach, but the season had not opened and I felt somehow that I couldn't wait. I wanted to get away somewhere by myself and just face things as they were. So one morning I said to John, "John, I think I'd like to go off somewhere for a little time, just to be by myself, dear, and I don't want you to ask to come with me or to follow me, but just let me go." John said, "All right, Minn. When are you going to start?" The cold brutality of it cut me to the heart, and I went upstairs and had a good cry and looked over steamship and railroad folders. I thought of Havana for a while, because the pictures of the harbour and the castle and the queer Spanish streets looked so attractive, but then I was afraid that at Havana a woman alone by herself might be simply persecuted by attentions from gentlemen. They say the Spanish temperament is something fearful. So I decided on Bermuda instead. I felt that in a beautiful, quiet place like Bermuda I could think everything all over and face things, and it said on the folder that there were always at least two English regiments in garrison there, and the English officers, whatever their faults, always treat a woman with the deepest respect.

So I said nothing more to John, but in the next few days I got all my arrangements made and my things packed. And when the last afternoon came I sat down and wrote John a long letter, to leave on my boudoir table, telling him that I had gone to Bermuda. I told him that I wanted to be alone: I said that I couldn't tell when I would be back—that it might be months, or it might be years, and I hoped that he would try to be as happy as he could and forget me entirely, and to send me money on the first of every month.

* * * * *

Well, it was just at that moment that one of those strange coincidences happen, little things in themselves, but which seem to alter the whole course of a person's life. I had nearly finished the letter to John that I was to leave on the writing-desk, when just then the maid came up to my room with a telegram. It was for John, but I thought it my duty to open it and read it for him before I left. And I nearly fainted when I saw that it was from a lawyer in Bermuda—of all places—and it said that a

legacy of two hundred thousand dollars had been left to John by an uncle of his who had died there, and asking for instructions about the disposition of it.

A great wave seemed to sweep over me, and all the wicked thoughts that had been in my mind—for I saw now that they *were* wicked—were driven clean away. I thought how completely lost poor old John would feel if all this money came to him and he didn't have to work any more and had no one at his side to help and guide him in using it.

I tore up the wicked letter I had written, and I hurried as fast as I could to pack up a valise with John's things (my own were packed already, as I said). Then presently John came in, and I broke the news to him as gently and as tenderly as I could about his uncle having left him the money and having died. I told him that I had found out all about the trains and the Bermuda steamer, and had everything all packed and ready for us to leave at once. John seemed a little dazed about it all, and kept saying that his uncle had taught him to play tennis when he was a little boy, and he was very grateful and thankful to me for having everything arranged, and thought it wonderful.

I had time to telephone to a few of my women friends, and they just managed to rush round for a few minutes to say good-bye. I couldn't help crying a little when I told them about John's uncle dying so far away with none of us near him, and I told them about the legacy, and they cried a little to hear of it all; and when I told them that John and I might not come back direct from Bermuda, but might take a run over to Europe first, they all cried some more.

We left for New York that evening, and after we had been to Bermuda and arranged about a suitable monument for John's uncle and collected the money, we sailed for Europe.

All through the happy time that has followed, I like to think that through all our trials and difficulties affliction brought us safely together at last.

III
THE SPLIT IN THE CABINET
OR, THE FATE OF ENGLAND

(A political novel of the Days that Were)

CHAPTER I

"The fate of England hangs upon it," murmured Sir John Elphinspoon, as he sank wearily into an armchair. For a moment, as he said "England," the baronet's eye glistened and his ears lifted as if in defiance, but as soon as he stopped saying it his eye lost its brilliance and his ears dropped wearily at the sides of his head.

Lady Elphinspoon looked at her husband anxiously. She could not conceal from herself that his face, as he sank into his chair, seemed somehow ten years older than it had been ten years ago.

"You are home early, John?" she queried.

"The House rose early, my dear," said the baronet.

"For the All England Ping-Pong match?"

"No, for the Dog Show. The Prime Minister felt that the Cabinet ought to attend. He said that their presence there would help to bind the colonies to us. I understand also that he has a pup in the show himself. He took the Cabinet with him."

"And why not you?" asked Lady Elphinspoon.

"You forget, my dear," said the baronet, "as Foreign Secretary my presence at a Dog Show might be offensive to the Shah of Persia. Had it been a Cat Show—"

The baronet paused and shook his head in deep gloom.

"John," said his wife, "I feel that there is something more. Did anything happen at the House?" Sir John nodded.

"A bad business," he said. "The Wazuchistan Boundary Bill was read this afternoon for the third time."

No woman in England, so it was generally said, had a keener political insight than Lady Elphinspoon.

"The third time," she repeated thoughtfully, "and how many more will it have to go?"

Sir John turned his head aside and groaned.

"You are faint," exclaimed Lady Elphinspoon, "let me ring for tea."

The baronet shook his head.

"An egg, John—let me beat you up an egg."

"Yes, yes," murmured Sir John, still abstracted, "beat it, yes, do beat it."

Lady Elphinspoon, in spite of her elevated position as the wife of the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain, held it not beneath her to perform for her husband the plainest household service. She rang for an egg. The butler broke it for her into a tall goblet filled with old sherry, and the noble lady, with her own hands, beat the stuff out of it. For the veteran politician, whose official duties rarely allowed him to eat, an egg was a sovereign remedy. Taken either in a goblet of sherry or in a mug of rum, or in half a pint of whisky, it never failed to revive his energies.

The effect of the egg was at once visible in the brightening of his eye and the lengthening of his ears.

"And now explain to me," said his wife, "what has happened. What *is* this Boundary Bill?"

"We never meant it to pass," said Sir John. "It was introduced only as a sop to public opinion. It delimits our frontier in such a way as to extend our suzerainty over the entire desert of El Skrub. The Wazoos have claimed that this is their desert. The hill tribes are restless. If we attempt to advance the Wazoos will rise. If we retire it deals a blow at our prestige."

Lady Elphinspoon shuddered. Her long political training had taught her that nothing was so fatal to England as to be hit in the prestige.

"And on the other hand," continued Sir John, "if we move sideways, the Ohulfs, the mortal enemies of the Wazoos, will strike us in our rear."

"In our rear!" exclaimed Lady Elphinspoon in a tone of pain. "Oh, John, we must go forward. Take another egg."

"We cannot," groaned the Foreign Secretary. "There are reasons which I cannot explain even to you, Caroline, reasons of State, which absolutely prevent us from advancing into Wazuchistan. Our hands are tied. Meantime if the Wazoos rise, it is all over with us. It will split the Cabinet."

"Split the Cabinet!" repeated Lady Elphinspoon in alarm. She well knew that next to a blow in the prestige the splitting of the Cabinet was about the worst thing that could happen to Great Britain. "Oh, John, they *must*

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