

have been Adrian's, might have been Adrian's, but for that cruel, hateful will, but for—she turned to her husband and wondered at what he was so intently gazing. Beyond the garden, there was nothing but the hills to be seen. Alys repeated his name before he turned around with a slight start.

"And all this would have been yours, Adrian, if you had married Miss Home?" she said wistfully.

"So it seems, but, you see, I preferred to choose my own wife," said Adrian, smiling into the limpid, uplifted eyes, "just as Miss Home would naturally want to choose her own husband."

"Then you never asked her!" exclaimed Alys, arching her slender brows. Look and tone implied that no more would have been needed.

But Adrian seemed blind to their unspoken flattery.

"No," he said briefly; "she was a mere child when my cousin first proposed it. She had never thought of such things. It seemed a wrong, an insult, to drag her into such a bargain before she knew anything of life, or even of her own mind."

"Was she so very young five years ago? Then I suppose she must look a good deal older now than she really is," said Alys musingly. "And you never saw her all these years till now?"

"No."

"But she was here all the time and always with your cousin," meaningly. "It does seem so funny that an old man like that should be your cousin," Alys added hastily, as if to cover her first remark, for Adrian had turned round, a sudden flash in his eyes.

"Alys, there is no use pretending to misunderstand you, but you must never hint at such a thing again. It would be base. I believe that my Cousin Lesley knew as little about Richard Skene's will as I did myself, and I believe his bequest is wholly unwelcome to her. My Cousin Richard hated my father, and he hated me because I was my father's son. It is an old story and an old grudge. I needn't trouble you with it, but from the way in which we parted I knew that I had nothing to expect. We have no right now to be disappointed, but one hopes against hope, and for your sake God knows I wish it had been otherwise."

"For my sake," said Alys, with a light, unmirthful laugh. "I've never known anything but a pinch, and I daresay we can still pinch along somehow, but it's you I'm thinking of, Adrian. This is your rightful place, and you know it, and then what books you could have written," enthusiastically. "No need to spoil them, as you say you do, trying to please other people and not pleasing them after all. It is you who should have had all this, a woman has no need of so much," with a sweeping glance which took in moor and meadow and field and rested longingly again upon the house. "If Miss Home is as generous as you say, why doesn't she share it with you?" with a sudden sharpness like the unsheathing of a kitten's claws from the little velvet foot.

"I believe she would if she could, or if I would, which is another matter," said Adrian, "but the will expressly forbids her doing anything so foolish. But she has done, or at least offered, all that is possible. She wants me to stay and manage the place for her."

Alys's "Oh!" was rather disappointed. If this were all which the mistress of Strode could offer, it did not sound very magnificent.

"But—but you wouldn't do it for nothing?" she ventured.

"No, of course not," said Adrian, with a somewhat uncomfortable laugh. "That's the rub. I don't know the figure exactly, but old Grant had a very handsome salary for doing nothing, so I used to think, but driving about all day in a dog-cart. I thought him a very enviable personage when I was a small chap. Tombreck, that pretty, ivy-covered house across the river, was his, but Lesley wants us to stay here at Strode."

The "Oh!" which burst from Alys's lips was of a very different quality from her last doubtful ejaculation. "To stay here!" she echoed in a tone almost of awe.

"But would you like to stay here, Alys?" asked Adrian, surprised.

"Would I like it? Oh, Adrian!" Alys drew a long breath and clasped her slim hands ecstatically. "Like to stay in a house like this! Why, the dinner-table last night was like fairy-land, like what one has read of in books! Just think of our poky rooms and the chops—chops—chops which Mrs. Joyce always sends in, no matter what I say to her, and her bills always so much bigger than you expect, and we haven't even had a day at the sea all this summer, though of course there is no sea here," with a somewhat disparaging glance at the majestic sweep of the moors. "Do you know," with a gleeful laugh, "I poked up the fire last night for pure pleasure, because I didn't need to think what the horrid coals would cost, and I'm afraid it was very

bad of me. I rang the bell twice, though I didn't really need anything, just to see the maid come in and curtsy—so," and she drew her little face into prim lines and stood demurely at attention with folded hands.

Adrian smiled in spite of himself, and then his look clouded.

"My poor little wife, I wish I could have done more for you," he said in a restrained voice.

"I have you," said Alys, pressing nearer to him, forgetful of the long row of windows behind.

There was a pause, and then Adrian said, trying to speak lightly, "I am afraid you would find it dull here. You would miss the streets and the shops and the theatres, and the running home to see how Dad is getting on without you, and Gwen and Sylvia and Rosalind and all their friends coming in to chatter with you, and—"

"Dull!" echoed Alys. "Dull here! I should miss nothing—nothing! I am sick of Mostyn Mansions. Oh, Adrian, think what a change it will be for me and I haven't had much in my life, have I? And think what it will be for us to have 'a handsome income'! How grand that sounds!"

"Alys," said Adrian in a troubled voice, "I didn't think you would look at it in this way. I hate to disappoint you, but—I haven't promised. Indeed, I



"You will think it over, at least, won't you," she ended beseechingly.

have given my cousin to understand that I can't do it—"

"Oh, Adrian!" Alys fell back a pace and stared at him in blank dismay. Then she sprang forward. "Don't say no, Adrian. Can't you tell her that you have changed your mind? If you don't care about it for yourself, though I don't see why you shouldn't, think what it would mean for me."

"It's not that I don't care for it, dear," gently, "but I'm not fit for it. Anything I knew about estate management, and that was precious little, has been driven out of my head long ago. I can't take my cousin's money and not give her a fair return for it—surely you see that."

Alys broke into a laugh of relief.

"You not fit! That's only one of your tiresome scruples, like paying that horrid old plumber when I did so want you to hire a piano. Of course you're fit—I wonder what you're not fit for."

"Not apparently to be a successful writer yet, as the world counts success, and I don't know if I ever shall be; but you know, Alys, what my dream is," and his voice had the uncertain note of one who hopes for sympathy but is doubtful of receiving it—"that some day I shall write something not merely for bread and butter, but which people will care to remember"—a pause—"I should have to give that dream up."

"I don't see why," said Alys eagerly. "You know the noise in the Mansions drives you nearly crazy. Why shouldn't you write ever so much better here

in the quietness? Well," as Adrian shook his head, "why not at least try it? If it won't work—why"—with a shrug of the thin shoulders under her gauze ruffles—"we are no worse off than we were; Mostyn Mansions won't run away," with a grimace.

"No, but I shouldn't be surprised to hear any day that they have collapsed like a house of cards. They are about as solid. You are a practical little woman not to encourage vain aspirations, but I don't know about being no worse off. I couldn't expect the 'Up-to-Date' and 'The Passing Hour' to be waiting for me with open arms, and one or two editors who are becoming dimly aware of my existence, will have wholly forgotten it in a week or two. What then?" Adrian had reverted to a half-jesting tone. Even yet he had perhaps not learned to take his wife quite seriously.

"Hateful old things! You were quite thrown away upon them," pouted Alys. "Something better would turn up." Then, with a swift change from the child-like manner, which Adrian, like many another man, was inclined to think implied child-like perceptions, she exclaimed, "Think it over again—think of me this time. I have never asked anything from you before, but I do ask this. You won't—you can't—refuse me."

Her little thin hands were locked tight round his arm, her eyes blazed passionate entreaty out of the small pale face. Adrian met that look for a moment and then turned away his head.

"Since you wish it so much, Alys," he said gravely, "I won't—I can't refuse if I can possibly help it. I've been able to gratify few enough of your wishes, but to give up my own work and decide to stay here is a very serious matter. It would mean a great deal to me—more than I can well explain," he added in a rather stifled voice.

He saw again the pained flush on Lesley's face, heard the note of disappointment and hurt hope in her voice, as she had said, "I thought you would have been more generous." He had read her mind as clearly as she had read his. With that knowledge between them, could he go to her again and tell her that what he had rejected a few hours ago he was now ready to accept?

Alys noticed the suppressed agitation in his voice, but she was so dazzled by her visions of what life at Strode would surely be, too vivid for any change, too eager for escape from the old cramped conditions to pay much heed to his last words. Afterwards she remembered them very well indeed, and put her own interpretation upon them. For the moment she was singly intent upon getting her own way. She stood silent for a moment, digging the point of her warm little shoe into a mossy crack between the flags.

"It sounds hateful to say it, I know," she said in a low voice and without looking up, "but—but your own work hasn't done much for us yet. We've always had bread, of course, but there's not been very much butter, has there? It has had to be pretty thinly scraped, and if—if you were to turn ill, if anything were to happen—if I were—alone—" The last word came in a whisper, on the rise of a sob. The eyes she lifted were wide with fright—a child's panic.

"Alys!" exclaimed Adrian, startled by her plea, more startled still that she should have made use of it, but, before he could speak, she had turned and fled away along the terrace.

Her slim, black figure, with its light, fluttering movements, was the only alien note in the old familiar picture. It vanished, and her husband, who had stood looking after her, a cloud of perplexity on his face, turned with a sigh towards the hills again—these hills of home for whose mighty solitudes and soothing, uplifting silence he had hungered so often in vain in the city wilderness.

Five years since he had looked upon their solemn, changeless outlines! Five years which had so changed himself and his world, and yet after all the experience had been no uncommon one.

When, in a hot fit of young, chivalrous wrath, he had refused to be a party to coercing Lesley's maiden will, he had little doubt that he could carve out a career for himself. Possibly he had cherished some vague dream of returning to Strode and wooing Lesley no longer to order, as he indignantly called it, and of laying laurels of his own reaping at her feet. There was time enough yet, she was still a child, he had decided at that hasty parting, when a warmer glance from her dark eyes might even yet have given him pause, but he had gone on his way and learned his lesson—a hard one. He had learned that it is one thing to plan generous schemes for the many from a safe vantage ground and another to be flung into the whirlpool to sink or to swim.

(To be continued)