TALES OF THE JURY ROOM

By Gerald Griffin

THE FIRST JURYMAN'S TALE

SIGISMUND — CONTINUED

"He said I could not do it, I thought I could, and I tried it, and I showed him his mistake, and that's all."

"Prince," said Basilius with dignity, "this grieves me to the heart." I took thee from the dungeon of the mountains, in the hope, that, by the native strength of thy own mind, thou mightest be enabled to resist the influence of the evil stars themselves, and that I might in mine old age, e'er I am gathered to the dust of my name, feel within my arms a son of my heart, who, when I was no more, should preserve my memory to my people. You have already destroyed that hope. I can never embrace thee now. We start when we gaze on the steel that has drank human blood, we shudder when we walk over the spot of earth which has once been the scene of a death-struggle, but how much more repulsive the contact of the murderer himself. Although I longed to bind thee to my side in love and fondness, and came hither to embrace and to bless thee, I turn away in horror, aversion, and sorrow, I never can, never will receive a murderer to my arms."

Sigismund paused for a moment, and a feeling like sorrow pierced through his mind. The fine venerable frame of the old silver-haired king struck him with a reverential respect. That man too was his father, and though never known till then, a voice within him told him that he was not as other men in his esteem. Again, his mind recurred to the causes of their separation, to his chain and his dungeon, his sufferings, his undeserved bondage. This train of recollections instantly overturned all that nature had been doing and changed the appearance of the old monarch into that of an unnatural and wanton tyrant. His heart burned within him, and he walked away from Basilius toward the window.

"I can do without them now," said he, "as I have ever. You say you are my father, and yet you have persecuted me from my birth like a bitter enemy, you have cast me out from human life, you have chained me up as if I were a creature of the forest, you have made me the monster you feared, you have sought my death, and tortured me into a weariness of my life. Why then, your kindness is grown a mockery, I could not enjoy, nor thank you for it. You have so entirely destroyed all capability of pleasure, that nothing now can ever make life agreeable."

"I would," said Basilius, "I had never given it to thee. I should not now bear thy reproaches, nor behold thy audacity."

"Had you not given it," replied Sigismund, "I should not complain of you, but I do for having given, and again taken it away. It may be a generous action to give; but to give for the purpose of taking away, is worse than withholding altogether."

To this Basilius replied, "How well dost thou show thy gratitude for my raising thee from a state of humiliating captivity, to the dignity which thou now holdest!"

Sigismund here burst into fury. "What gratitude," he cried, "tyrant of my happiness, do I owe thee? Old and decrepit as thou art, and about to drop into the grave, what dost thou give me that is not my own. Thou art my father and a king. Then all that dignity of which thou speakest was given me by nature and the laws. Nay, but thou owest me much that is yet unaccounted for. What will thy answer be, when I demand of thee the time of which thou hast robbed me—my liberty so long debarred—my life—the honour which I might have acquired, had I been left free to seek it? I owe thee nothing, king, but thou art my debtor, and to a large amount."

"Thou art a daring savage," said Basilius, "and the word of heaven has been accomplished. Yet haughty and vain man, I warn thee to beware, for all this which thou seest may be a dream, from which thou mayest e'er long awaken." Saying this he withdrew suddenly, leaving Sigismund much startled by the repitition of this singular doubt.

"A dream," he again exclaimed in a soft voice, and with a look of astonishment and perplexity. "No, I do not dream, for I can feel and seen, and I know what I was, and what I am. Grieve as thou mayest, no remedy is in thy breast."

In a little time after, while Sigismund remained perplexed by the parting word of Basilius, his attention was attracted by the entrance of Rosaura who now appeared dressed in her own habiliments. She was proceeding in search of Estrella, anxious at the same time to avoid the sight of Astolpho, Clotaldus having advised her to leave him in ignorance of her presence at the court of Poland. She felt grateful to Clotaldus for the interest which he appeared to take in her fortunes, and readily submitted to his guidance.

"What," said Clarin to Sigismund, "has pleased thee most of all that thou hast seen this morning?"

"Nothing has surprised me," said Sigismund, "for I have seen nothing here that my education did not in some measure enable me to anticipate. But if my admiration has been really moved at all, it has been by the beauty of the ladies who have left us."

At this moment, perceiving Rosaura about to retire, he started forward and detaining her exclaimed, "What do I see. I have surely beheld those features before now?"

"And I," said Rosaura, "have seen that pomp and greatness reduced to chains and a dungeon."

Saying this she attempted to retire, but Sigismund again prevented her, "I must crave your permission to depart," said Rosaura, in some confusion.

"Going in such a hurried manner," said Sigismund, "is not asking leave, but taking it."

At this moment, Clotaldus, whose anxiety had been greatly excited by hearing the voice of Rosaura in disputation with Sigismund, hurried into the apartment. "My lord," he exclaimed, "what is the cause of this? Pray you forbear, and suffer the lady to proceed."

"Again," exclaimed Sigismund, "again, thou gray-headed madman, darest thou to provoke my anger? dost thou not fear me yet?"

"I was induced to enter," said Clotaldus, "by the accents of this voice, to tell thee that thou shouldst be more peaceful if thou desirest to reign. Be not a tyrant because thou thinkest thyself Our Lord, for you may yet find that thought a dream."

The anger of Sigismund was provoked to the highest by this threat. "I shall see," he exclaimed, "whether it be a dream by tearing thee to pieces." He grasped his dagger hastily, but Clotaldus arrested his arm and threw himself on his knees, whilst the affrighted Rosaura called loudly for assistance.

Her cries were heard by Astolpho, who rushed into the room, and throwing himself between the prince and the object of his anger, "What means this? that so generous a prince will stain his dagger in blood that is well nigh frozen? Let thy shining sword return to its scabbard."

"Yes," said Sigismund, "after I have reddened it in that villain's heart."

"Then," replied the pompous Astolpho, "since he has sought protection at my feet, he shall not plead in vain." And seeing the prince about to transfer his anger from Clotaldus to himself, he drew his sword and stood on the defensive.

The noise attracted to the place the king, Estrella, and several of their attendants who interposed between the combatants. Astolpho returned his sword to its sheath, and the king, being informed that Sigismund had attempted the life of Clotaldus, said to the former:—

"Have gray hairs, then, no respect in thine eyes?"

"None," replied Sigismund, "and I trust that one day I shall see thine own at my feet. Be assured that the opportunity for vengeance shall not be lost."

"Before that day comes," replied the king," thou shalt sleep, and waking find that thy boast and thy ingratitude, real as they seem to thee, are but the phantoms of an idle dream."

Once more Sigismund started at the words, and remained for some moments as if under the influence of a spell, motionless and silent, while the king and his guests departed. Astolpho, leading out Estrella, conducted her towards the garden, where the following conversation passed between them.

"When fortune," said Astolpho, "promises mishap, she is seldom false to her word, but whenever she has benefits to confer the issue is doubtful. A demonstration of this truth may be found in the situation of Sigismund and of myself. For him evils and crimes were foretold, and they have turned out true. For me, on the other hand, were predicted, trophies of victory, the applause of men, and happiness, yet though this prophecy has been in part fulfilled, its completion is still doubtful, for although you have favoured me with some encouragement, yet your disdain I am sorry to say——"

Estrella interrupted him. "I doubt not," said she, "that you are sincere in those compliments, but, I suspect they are meant for the lady whose portrait I have seen hanging at your neck. Go," she added, "and let her reward you, for it is a treachery not only to break your faith to her, but to make over the compliments that were her right, on other ladies."

At this moment Rosaura arrived, in her search of Estrella, at the very spot where they were conversing. She arrested her steps however, on perceiving Astolpho, and concealed herself, while her heart burned with jealousy and anger, behind the arbour where the royal relatives were seated, while the conversation proceeded.

"Where the sun shines," said Astolpho," no lesser luminary can appear, neither can darkness longer exist; but that you may be convinced that you alone reign within this breast, I will bring thee that portrait of which thou speakest. Pardon me, Rosaura," he added within his own mind, as he bowed and hurried from the arbour, "but absent lovers never keep their vows, any more than I do mine to you."

The instant Rosaura perceived that he had left the garden, she presented herself before Estrella.

"Oh! I am glad to see thee," said the princess, "I was longing for a confidant, and to you alone can I intrust the secret which I am anxious to communicate."

"Madam," said Rosaura, "you may rest assured that your confidence shall be honoured."

"The little time," said Estrella, "that I have had the pleasure of knowing you, you have by some means, of which I am myself unconscious, found the entrance to my heart. I will therefore confide to you what I have been anxious to conceal from myself. But this it is. My cousin Astolpho (I said *cousin*, because there are some things the mere thought of which is as palpable as the utterance of others) is about to wed with me, thus compensating by one felicity for a number of misfortunes. I showed some pique this morning when I saw him, on account of a portrait which hung from his neck, and he, who is, I am sure, very sincere in his professions, has just offered to bring it to me. It would annoy me to receive it from his hand, and I must beg of thee to remain here and obtain it for me. Farewell a little while. I say no more, for I know you are discreet and beautiful, and know, I am sure, what love is."

"I would," exclaimed Rosaura, "that I knew it not so well," and she gazed after the princess with a look of deep sorrow rather than of envy. "But what," she continued, "shall I do in this strange situation? Does there exist in the world a more unfortunate person than myself? If I discover myself to him, Clotaldus, to whom I owe my life and safety here, will have deep reason for offence, for he advised me to expect redress from silence only, but what will my silence avail if he but chance to see me? My tongue — my voice — my eyes—may refuse to inform him, but my soul will contradict them all."

At this moment Astolpho entered the arbour.

"I have brought you," said he, the portrait which—but what do I see—" and he paused in deep and sudden confusion.

"Why does your highness tower?" said Rosaura coolly; "what do [illegible] that vase prizes you?"

"You, Rosaura, here!" said Astolpho.

"I Rosaura," she exclaimed, appearing surprised, "your highness must mistake me for some other lady. My name is Astrea—far too insignificant a person to occasion so much confusion to your highness."

"Nay, Rosaura," said Astolpho, "you have carried the feint far enough. I may gaze on thee as Astrea, but I will always love thee as Rosaura."

"My lord," Rosaura replied, still with the same air of calmness and surprise, "I do not understand what you have just said, and therefore I cannot answer you. All I can say is, that the princess commanded me to wait your arrival here, and on her art to receive from you the portrait which you promised her. It is just I should obey her even in matters that jar with my own inclinations."

"How ill dost thou dissemble, Rosaura," said Astolpho, "notwithstanding all thy efforts."

"I wait for the portrait, my lord," Rosaura, extending her hand coldly.

"Well! well!" said the prince, "since you choose to carry on your dissimulation to the end, I shall answer you in the same manner. Go, Astrea, and tell the princess that I love her so truly, that I could not be satisfied with sending her merely the portrait she demands; I will do her a still greater pleasure by presenting her with the original, which you can easily convey to her in your own person."

The taunt threw Rosaura off her guard. "I came here," she said, indignantly, "to receive a portrait, and although I could convey the original, which, as you observe, is far more precious, I should go slighted to go without the copy; your highness will please to give it me, then, for I shall not leave this until I have obtained it."

"But how shall that be," returned Astolpho, "if I choose to keep it?"

"Thus, ingrate," replied Rosaura, making a vain effort to snatch it from his hand "no other woman I am resolved shall ever possess it."

"How angry you are," said the prince.

"And how perfidious thou."

"No more, my Rosaura."

"I thine! villain—it is false."

The altercation had reached this point, when Estrella suddenly re-entered the arbour. "Astrea!" she exclaimed, "Astolpho, what is this?"

"Here comes Estrella," said Astolpho to Rosaura, who after a moment's consideration, addressed the princess. "If you wish to know, madam," said she "the cause of our dispute, it was this:—The prince has by some means obtained a portrait of mine, and, instead of delivering that which you commanded me to receive from him, he even refuses to give me my own. That which he holds in his hand is mine—you may see if it does not resemble me."

Estrella took the portrait from the hand of the astonished Astolpho, and looking on it said—"It is prettily done, but a little too highly coloured; you have grown pale, Rosaura, since you sat for this portrait."

"Nay, madam," said Rosaura, suppressing a sigh, "but is it not evidently mine?"

"Who doubts it?" said the princess, handing it to her.

"Now," said Rosaura, darting a smile of malicious triumph at the prince as she withdrew, "you may ask him for the other, he may give it to you more readily than he would to me."

"You heard what Astrea said," said Estrella, addressing the prince "although I intend never again to see or speak to you, yet I will not, since I was so silly as to ask for that portrait, suffer it to remain in your hands."

Astolpho continued for some time in much perplexity. "Beautiful Estrella," he at length said, "I would gladly obey your commands, but it is not in my power to give the minature, because—"

"Thou art a vile and uncourteous lover," replied," replied Estrella, haughtily, "but I will not now receive it, for I would not thus remind myself that I stooped to require it."

Saying this she withdrew, and proceeded in high indignation towards the palace, while Astolpho endeavoured in vain to detain her. "By what enchantment," said he, "has this Rosaura so suddenly appeared to thrust me back from happiness; what wizard brought her here from Muscovy: has she come to ruin me and herself?"

We shall now return to Sigismund. During supper the attendants administered to him a second sleeping potion. A deep trance succeeded, during which, by the orders of the king, they restored him to his rude clothing, his dungeon and his chains.

"Here," said Clotaldus, on beholding him once more stretched upon the sandy floor, "here, where it first arose, thy haughtiness shall end."

"Sigismund!—ha!—Sigismund!" exclaimed Clarin who had accompanied Clotaldus, "awake, and you will find some change in your condition.

Clotaldus, who apprehended some indiscretion from Clarin, resolved to have him also shut up, and said to the attendants, "Prepare a room for this gentleman who can talk so loud in the tower, where he can entertain himself until his lungs are weary. Stay! let it be in the adjoining room—this is the man," he added, pointing to Clarin.

The attendants approached and seized him.

"Me," said Clarin, quite surprised, "why so?"

"Because," replied Clotaldus, "my good Clarin, my clarion, my trumpet, you know some secrets and sound a note too loud."

"But," said Clarin, "I never yet sought to kill my father, nor have ever I flung a man through a window; nor do I ever dream, although I may sleep now and then; and why should you shut me up like Sigismund?"

"Come—come—trumpet, come—clarion."

"Do you call me clarion! Nay! but I will be a cornet if you please, and then I shall be silent, for that is a vile instrument."

The attendants here dragged him away. Perceiving Basilius approach, whose curiosity had led him to witness the demeanour of Sigismund in his dungeon, Clotaldus pointed him out to the monarch as he lay stretched on the ground.

"Alas! unhappy prince," said the king, "born on an unfortunate hour. Approach, Clotaldus, and awake him, for the beverage he drank has deprived him of his vigour and his cruelty."

"Sire," replied Clotaldus, "he seems very restless, he dreams and speaks aloud; let us attend."

Sigismund here turned uneasily on his back, and murmured:—"He who punishes tyrants is a pious prince; let Clotaldus die by my sword, and let my father kiss my feet."

"He threatens my life," said Clotaldus.

He wishes to humble me with the dust on which he treads," said the king—"but hark!"

"Let me," continued Sigismund, "put forward on the great arena of the world the valour that I feel burning in my veins, and let me slake the thirsty vengeance of my soul by showing the world Prince Sigismund triumphant over his father."

At these words he awoke; and Basilius, wishing to avoid him, concealed himself in one of the adjacent passages of the tower. The astonished Sigismund stared wildly around him.

"Alas!" said he, "where am I—am I again the same—again do I behold my chains—art thou, oh hated tower, again my tomb? It is so—then what dreams have I had?"

Clotaldus went towards him and said, "Ever since I left thee soaring in mind with the eagle, in whose track my poor brain could not accompany you, I have been absent from the tower. Hast thou been all this time asleep?"

"I have," said Sigismund, "nor can I say that I am now awake, for if that which passed palpably before me was nothing more than a dream I may be dreaming still. If I could see while I slept, it may be that I sleep now while I see."

"What didst thou dream of then? said Clotaldus.

"Since it was but a dream," replied Sigismund, "I will tell thee. I awoke as I thought from the sleep in which I was left by thee, and found myself lying on a bed, which by the rich variety of its colours might be compared to the flowery couch which the spring spreads upon the mountain. Here hundreds of noblemen came forward, bowing submissively, bestowing on me the title of prince, and presenting me with embroidered clothes and jewels. My suspense was turned into joy when thou camest into me, and saidst, that though I had been in this condition I was nevertheless the prince and the heir of Poland."

"No doubt you rewarded me well for my news," said Clotaldus.

"Not so well," returned Sigismund. "I was twice about to put thee to death as a traitor!"

"What! did you treat me with so much rigour?"

"Ah!" said Sigismund, "I was lord of all, and I wrought revenge on all. A woman alone I loved, and this is the only feeling from which I have not yet awoke.

The king at these words withdrew altogether, and Clotaldus, addressing the prince said: "As we had been speaking of the eagle and of the empires of the earth, they haunted thee in thy dreams; but even in thy dreams it would have been well to have had some respect for him who reared and instructed thee, for even in sleep there is a pleasure in doing good."

"It is true," replied Sigismund thoughtfully, "let me then repress this fierceness of temper—this fury—this ambition—in case those dreams should return, which they will surely do, for life is now to me nothing more. Experience tells me that all who live are dreamers, and death the voice that awakens them. The monarch dreams of changes of state and government, and of power and flattery, but his fame is written on the wind; death comes, and his pomp and royalty are crumbled into ashes; and yet, knowing that death shall wake them, there are men who wish to reign; the rich man dreams of his wealth, that costs him many a tear; the poor man dreams of his misery and frets at shadows; the ambitious man dreams of grandeur and self-aggrandizement; the courtier dreams of rank and office; the injured man dreams of his revenge; all, in a word, dream of their several conditions. I dream that I am here loaded with these chains; and but now I dreamed that I filled a happier station; life itself is an illusion, a shadow, an empty fiction; the heaviest sorrow is but light, and the brightest joy but vain, for life is a dream, and there is nothing in it that can boast a foundation."

In the meantime poor Clarin paced the chamber in which he was confined in much peevishness and discontent.

"Here I am," said he, "confined in this tower for what I know; what will they do to me then for what I do not know? I pity myself very much, and people will say that it is very natural, and so it is; for what can be more mournful than for a man who has got such excellent grinders as mine to be left without a morsel to keep them in practice, while I am starving with hunger. Here all is silence around me—me who can never close my lips, not even when I sleep—here am I, a social fellow, without a companion—no, I tell an untruth, I have plenty; there are plenty of rats and spiders, pretty robins to chirp about my windows, my head is filled with the frightful visions that have been haunting me since I entered. I have seen spectres, ghosts, hobgobblins, elves and fairies; some mounting, some descending and cutting all kinds of strange capers; but what I feel most particularly is, that I am kept starved ever since I came in here; yet I deserve all this, and more for having kept a secret, while I was a servant, which is the greatest infidelity I could be guilty of to my masters."

His soliloquy was interrupted by the sounds of drums and trumpets outside, and by the cries of a multitude of people, who were heard exclaiming "Here he is—this is the tower—let us dash the door to pieces."

"What's this," cried Clarin, "they are looking for me, there is no doubt of that, for they say here I am, and that this is the tower. What can they want me for? Here they come. Hallo! there is a crash!"

At the same instant, the door was forced from its hinges, and an armed mob burst into the room.

"Take him to me," said a soldier.

"It is not he," replied Clarin, who was apprehensive that they might not mean him kindly.

"Sire," cried one of the soldiers, "thou art our prince."

"These fellows are drunk," said Clarin.

"Yes, thou art our prince. We will not have a foreign king, while a natural one remains to us. Allow us to kiss your highness's hand."

At these words all shouted, "Live our prince, long live our prince!"

"They are in earnest," said Clarin to himself. "I should wish to know if it be the custom of this country to shut up a man every day in the tower to make a prince of him, and then bring him back to his prison again. Yes, there's no doubt of it, for I saw the same thing done yesterday. Well, well, I shall play my part to-day."

"Sire!" said one of the soldiers, "we have all told thy father the same thing, that you alone shall be our king, and not the prince of Muscovy."

"What," cried Clarin, "were ye wanting in respect to my father?"

"It was through loyalty for thee," said a soldier.

"Then," said Clarin waving his hand "if it was through loyalty for me, I forgive ye."

"Come out and regain thy crown," exclaimed the people. "Long live Sigismund."

Clarin hearing the prince's name, started in some surprise. "Sigismund they say," he repeated to himself "but what do I care for that. Do I not know that they call every counterfeit prince, Sigismund."

Sigismund however, who heard his name thus proclaimed, called aloud from the inner dungeon. "Who calls on Sigismund?" The soldiers hearing this voice hurried Clarin into the next room, and beholding a man in chains, and so rudely clothed, inquired in some surprise, "what man is this?"

"This man," said the prince, "is Sigismund."

"Sigismund!" exclaimed a soldier, turning hastily to Clarin. "Then how hadst thou the audacity to call thyself by that name?"

"I call myself Sigismund!" exclaimed Clarin, "it is false, it was you who had the audacity to nickname me Sigismund."

"Great price," said a soldier addressing himself to Sigismund, "we find by the tokens that were given us, that thou art our lord and sovereign. Your father the great king Basilius, terrified by the prophecy, which says that thou shalt one day wrest the sceptre from his grasp, has resolved to rob thee of thy right and transfer it to Astolpho of Muscovy. For this purpose he assembled his court. But the people, having learned that they possess a native prince in thee, have refused to submit to the yoke of a foreigner; they have sought thee therefore in this tower in the hope that thou wilt use their arms for the recovery of thy birthright—come forward then, for in the plains beneath this mountain, a numerous army waits to proclaim thee. Liberty attends thy coming. Hark, and hear her accents."

The cries of "long live Sigismund," had been gradually increasing, and now they were heard swelling like the roar of the winter ocean.

"Again," exclaimed Sigismund, "must I again hear those sounds, again must I dream of splendor that time shall so soon undo? Must I again stand among shadows, and see majesty and greatness vanish before the wind? It must not be. Ye shall not see me yoked again to Fortune's car; and since I know that life is but a dream, vanish ye shadows that pass before my troubled senses, feigning a substance and a sound, which in reality ye do not possess. I wish not for false majesty, vain pomps, fantastic splendors, which at the first breath of morn will fly and disappear like the early blossom of the almond tree, which the gentlest breeze will scatter on the earth bereft of color, beauty, brilliancy, and fragrance. I know ye; yes, I know ye; and know further that the same delusions pass over the minds of all who sleep. Ye can deceive me no longer, for I know that you are dreams."

"My lord," said a soldier, "if you think that we deceive you, turn thy eyes toward yonder mountain, and see the multitude that await thy orders."

"Aye!" said Sigismund, "that very thing I saw once as clearly and distinctly as I now behold it, and yet I did but dream."

"Great things, my lord," returned the soldier, "are always ushered in by presages, and those visions you speak of, were the dreams that foretold the reality you now behold."

"Rightly, thou sayest rightly," replied Sigismund, "and though they were dreams alone, there can be no harm since life is so short, in dreaming once again, and dreaming with so much prudence and caution, that on my waking I may find no cause for sorrow; knowing that I must wake at some time, my disappointment will be less when that time arrives. And knowing that my power is merely borrowed and must be restored to its owner, let me use it worthily. "Subjects," he exclaimed aloud, starting to his feet, "I value your loyalty as highly as it deserves. In me you will find a prince, who boldly and successfully will free you from the foreign bondage which you fear. Sound to arms, and should I wake before this is accomplished, and before I have prostrated my father at my feet—but what do I say; my old passion has returned upon me; this is not right, it is not right to say it, even though it never should be done."

As he uttered these words, the shouts were again renewed, and Clotaldus hurried with a look of terror into the apartment. "What shouts are these?" he exclaimed, "I am lost. Prince," he added throwing himself on his knees before Sigismund, "I am come to receive my death at thy hands."

"Not so, my father," replied the prince, "arise from the earth, for thou shalt be the guide of my inexperience in this warfare. I know that to thy cares and anxieties I am indebted for my education."

"What say you?" replied Clotaldus, in astonishment at the mild and altered manner of the prince.

"That I am dreaming," replied the latter, "and that there is a pleasure in doing good even in dreams."

"Then, my lord," said Clotaldus, "if it be thy intention to act according to the dictates of wisdom, let it not offend thee that I should follow those of duty. If you purpose making war on your father, I cannot aid you with my counsel, for he is my king. I am at thy feet; give me death."

TO BE CONTINUED

THE LOVE STORY OF DEAN ANDREWS

(By Rhodes Campbell, in The Rosary Magazine.)

I'm a stenographer.

Not the kind you read about that men are always falling in love with, but a down-to-the-ground business woman.

When Mr. Andrews, of the firm of Lippincott & Andrews, lawyers, made me the largest offer I had yet had, I accepted promptly after giving notice to my employer and obtaining a substitute. He read me the riot act on ingratitude, but I am used to that.

I supposed that Mr. Andrews would be like many of my employers and expected nothing. I found him high-minded, honorable, courteous. He was making a name for himself in his profession, and was up to his neck in work. But this suited me. I'm not afraid of work. In my years of experience with men I have learned to regard my employers as a cash basis from which I draw in order to live; they look upon me as a machine to do their bidding. This machine must be in order, run well, do good work; so I try to keep in good physical condition, give my attention as well as my time to the matter on hand, and incidentally dress well. No frills for me, but my tailored suits and shirt waists are as fresh as they are severely plain. You see, it is not only my own living upon which my success depends, but that of another. I have a delicate young sister to keep and educate. From the time I was twelve I have had cares and responsibilities. My parents and money were taken from me, and I had to face the world young and inexperienced. At eighteen I came to the city—it seems a lifetime ago. But I make ends meet, and lay up a little some months. It seems a pity to waste words on myself before coming to the real story of Mr. Andrews, but it seems a necessary prelude to what follows.

I had been at my new place for six months when I noticed a change in my employer. He who was always alert and keen seemed to attend to his work with apparent effort. I decided that he could not be well.

One day as he dictated and my pencil waited for the next word, I could hardly believe my ears when, instead of terse, ready, business-like English which was always a delight to me, he began abruptly in a worried tone: "Miss Townsend, may I trouble you with a little personal matter? You see, I am quite alone in the world, no near womenkind. My uncle is the best ever, but unfortunately he and I don't agree on a matter which to me is vital. I have observed you closely for all these months, and I feel that you have horse sense. You are dependable, with no foolishness about you. Now I want your opinion about the case in hand. Your clear view of the Potter claim aided my decision; why can you not help me in this?" He hesitated, then plunged boldly into the statement of his new case.

"I have met all kinds of women, but no one appealed to me until lately. Then, as fate would have it, the woman is out of my set, and unlike all my traditions." Noting my look, he hastened to add: "Out of my set, but not out of my class. She is a lady a thoroughbred." He paused then went on with decided effort. "Never mind how I met her. I shall spare you details and a lover's rhapsodies. I—perhaps you can hardly understand—I fought against this strange, incomprehensible feeling. I am used to conquering, but to my amazement the thing conquered me. I am very ambitious, too much so perhaps. My uncle has done so much for me, I refused further help after college days. He believes in me, and I was determined to show him that his pride and belief were not ill-founded. I have worked hard. No one but a struggling young lawyer could realize the strenuous life these years have meant to me. Then, as I have gained the foothold I have fought for, I fall in love like the veriest schoolboy with a girl who is worse than obscure. Her father is a byword among her neighbors and acquaintances. He is a common drunkard, dishonest, with no gentlemanly instincts. I cannot believe that she is his daughter. Her mother is different. Perhaps you will despise me when I tell you that I hesitated. It seemed to me that I owed it to my uncle and to myself to avoid such a marriage. It was no use, however. Logic went to the winds before my overmastering love. I found myself urging her with all the power of which I am capable to become my wife. But she refuses absolutely. Nothing can change her. She says that when she found out about her father, she made up her mind that marriage was not for her. I cannot tell you all she said. She talked fluently, and her conclusions were logical, but I find that I cannot live without her. I love her with a mature man's passion. After all these years I have fallen a victim to the feeling that has often puzzled me, and which I have secretly ridiculed. My uncle has heard of what he is pleased to call my intended mesalliance. I don't blame him; he doesn't know her. But I must win the woman. And I confess I am powerless. Can you suggest any means of overcoming her resolution?"

"Does she love you?" I asked.

"She does not deny it. I believe she does." Mr. Andrews' voice was so humble—even meek—that I hardly recognized it.

"I fear it is a hard proposition, but I have known women to change their minds under similar conditions," I observed rather lamely.

"Have you?" he began eagerly; then in a tone of deep dejection: "But you don't know her. She is sweet and lovable but immovable on this point. She not only believes it will injure my career, but she refuses on the score of heredity. If she were an opposing lawyer, I would admire her clear forcible statement of objections, but as it is I am indignant and dejected in turn. I feel helpless with your sex, Miss Townsend. I hoped you might suggest some method yet untried."

"I fear I can do little, Mr. Andrews; but if you will let me think it over I may be able to suggest something—"

"And if my uncle talks with you, you will present my side of it?" he urged with that new humble air which was so utterly foreign to him.

I smiled inwardly at the unlikelihood of his oldsoly experienced uncle consulting or even mentioning the subject to a strange stenographer in his nephew's office! But then, after Mr. Andrews' confidence, why not the deluge?

We went on with the days routine as if nothing had interrupted. I would have sworn it was all a dream, only for the pallor and haunting eyes before me. Whatever it meant to the woman, for the man it spelled tragedy. I wondered who the woman was and if she really were worthy of such devotion. For I liked Dean Andrews. His honor was unimpeachable. He talked of a ruling ambition, but he had proved to me that honor and love were above and beyond it.

I hurried home anxious, as always, about Louise. I found her ill, and with her Miss Claflin, her teacher. The attack was nothing serious, but I always worry about the child. She is all that I have. I insisted on Elizabeth Claflin staying to tea. Her kindness to Louise had won me at first, and since then her own sterling worth and charming personality had made me her warm friend. She was the only one with whom I was at all intimate. She had been Louise's teacher for three years when I had taken her from the Public schools to the excellent private one where Elizabeth was assistant.

After the dishes were washed and put away and Louise was asleep, I lay on my couch in my tiny sitting-room, while Elizabeth sat near in my big chair. We sat a while without talking; Elizabeth is so restful and understanding. Then:

"You are tired, dear."

"And you are ill," I retorted.

"I am perfectly well," Elizabeth asserted eagerly.

"It's no use playing Sapphira with me," I said, severely. "In all these weeks what have you been doing to yourself?"

"Well, then, I confess I am a little troubled," she admitted.

"Why not tell me? I want to forget business and the daily grind."

"I've always been determined not to bother you with my trials; you have enough of your own."

"And so you haven't treated me as a friend? Try me, Elizabeth. I am an undemonstrative creature, but I love you dearly. I may not be able to help you, but sometimes the mere admission of a cross lightens it somewhat."

"Don't tempt me, for I shall fall. Its merely an affair of the heart." Elizabeth spoke lightly and with a cynical air new to her. "I suppose I have a broken heart, Virginia; but, as you see, I still live. The man in the case has a desirable and prominent position which he has won by the hardest kind of work. He came to see me in the interest of one of his clients"—she bit her lip over the inadvertant admission, then hurried on, "I could prove a point in the case and had to give evidence. Well, he kept on coming, and the other day declared his love and insisted on a speedy marriage. It is the usual thing, you see." She laughed mirthlessly.

"And did you not refuse?" I asked with unconscious reproach.

"And why shouldn't I?" She spoke still with that new bitterness. "Why should I spoil his career? Why should I burden him?"

I looked at her in consternation mingled with impatience. "This is a new role, Elizabeth. I did not know that self-depreciation was a prominent characteristic of yours."

"Oh, it's not that! He is above me mentally, but I don't feel that I should disgrace him. You surely know, Virginia, why I cannot marry?

Something gripped my heart. I thought of the other confession, and I waited, fearing, yet certain of what was to follow. I shook my head in denial.

"You have certainly heard of my father."

Again I shook my head. "We live so far apart, and I have been so engrossed with my work," I reminded her.

"I shall never forget when I first heard of it," she went on in dull tone, as if reciting a lesson. "My mother had somehow managed to send me away to an excellent school for years, and I was at home on my last vacation but one when I had a slight misunderstanding with a neighbor's daughter, an ill-bred common girl with whom I had had heretofore little to do. She grew very angry, and in her rage hurled the information regarding my father at my head, which my mother had so carefully kept from me. I listened with increasing conviction that every word she spoke was true. I had suspected that he drank but now I knew that that was not the worst. I turned from her without a word and went straight to my mother. She could not deny it. I begged her to leave him—the girl had told me that he often ill-used her, especially of late—but she refused. Virginia, I cannot understand my mother's attitude. I've tried to, but I can't. It would be impossible for me to love a man whom I could not only fail to respect but for whom I have contempt. Yet she loves him and clings to him as a mother to her sinning child. She says no one cares for him but her, and she could not desert him. She cried heart-brokenly over my knowledge of the disgrace, until I felt ashamed to think of myself when I realized all she had borne and what she had done for me. I put my arms about her and told her we would bear it together and so lighten it, or at least make the burden a little less heavy. I studied that last year strenuously and took honors. I have taught ever since, and have made up my mind that never would I risk carrying on the dishonor and perpetuating it by marriage and probable progeny. My mother knows nothing of this and cannot understand why I have refused a man such as this one, because I cannot love him. No wonder she thinks me cold and abnormal! Who, knowing Dean Andrews—there! I've told the name! Well, Virginia, you know that it is your employer. If you weren't the woman you are I should regret the slip more keenly. I have never mentioned my feeling about my father nor about this affair to any