



# T H E THIRTEEN WEEKS

A Romance in Three Chapters

By VIOLET IRWIN



TWO men sat in the rotunda of the hotel. "I have invited some ladies to dinner and hope you will join us," said the younger. The other acquiesced readily; he was feeling somewhat bored, and besides he liked Pendleton. He had met the young mining broker for a business appointment two days before, and admired the way in which he carried the situation, because, for Pendleton, the events of the next few days meant a fortune made or lost.

He held an option on a Cobalt property that Long Brothers of Boston thought of buying, and not only would the commission and profits on the deal be considerable, but connection with such a firm meant wealth for the young New Yorker.

Hebbon was himself interested with his friends the Long Brothers in the investment, and now he and Pendleton put in time exhausting the limits of the Canadian city, while they waited for Mr. Morton Long's arrival expected on the following day, when they would all go on to the camp, look over the property, while Hebbon would give his professional opinion as an engineer. In the meantime an informal dinner and perhaps a theatre promised amusement.

Hebbon wondered idly what Pendleton's friends would be like, then dismissed them from his mind. By birth, a son of oldest Boston, and by luck and skillful management proprietor of several millions, he had always been a prime favourite with mothers and had become slowly inured to the charms of many engaging and would-be-engaged daughters.

The men regretted the absence of evening clothes when, a little before seven, they met in the corridor, but laughingly agreed that as they were only en route for Cobalt in winter the lack must be excused; Hebbon, however, observed that his companion had made the most of a limited wardrobe, and saw himself falling to the company of the chaperon.

They were met on the way down by a bell boy with a telegram for Hebbon, and when a few minutes after the latter reached the drawing-room, the ladies had already arrived. He was immediately introduced to a handsome woman, who at the first glance appeared older than her face justified, owing to perfectly white hair. But the other was talking to an elderly man with a close-cropped grey head, whom he recognised as the Hon. Chief Justice Sir John Barton, and she continued the conversation oblivious of the waiting introduction.

While he exchanged polite remarks with Mrs. Martin-Brown, he took a good look at the girl. She seemed merry and vivacious, and his trained eye noticed how beautifully she was gowned in some shimmering, light-blue material, with flashes of black and gold. He knew when a woman was ill-dressed or when some ultra fashion obtruded, but there was no lack of harmony here. Again he spent a regretful thought on his own unconventional attire, for he was handsome with a man's beauty and knew it. The old man while he talked watched the girl with the undisguised admiration which is the privilege of age; they were evidently fast friends; Pendleton also seemed to be intimate and asked him to make a fifth at dinner but he refused, and with another gust of merriment, more nodding of the black plumes on her little white toque, and a prolonged shaking of hands he was gone; and even as Hebbon bowed over the little gloved hand she extended he heard the clear voice saying:

"Is he not a dear? I'm so glad we met him!"

She seemed to float before them down the long room on the tide of her own joy, and with the same insouciant spirit buoyed them all over the arrangement of places and the choice of food.

Miss Athol Munroe possessed the rare gift of making other people talk well, and Hebbon the reticent was soon telling stories of "Half-Cock Bob," the terror of the Gold Gulch. He was at his best so, telling of the life he had lived in the wilds of Nevada, of the life he had loved, the men he had known, queer human cyphers, of the lust of gold and the power of hate; finding her eyes intent upon him

he gave full swing to his narrative. He had intended to be modest concerning his own experiences, but with a sympathetic question or two she had elicited all the facts about his famous pistol practice with "Half-Cock," and she toasted the victor at the finish as a tribute to the undaunted spirit.

Then the conversation turned aside into quieter channels of reminiscence; they were discussing a former dinner and it was Hebbon's turn to listen. His mind detached itself and wandered back to the deal, wondering if Pendleton counted Miss Munroe among the possibilities that fortune was just then holding out to him. Certainly they seemed very intimate. He admired more than ever the younger man's cool balance; what an amusing fellow he was, this off-hand, quick-witted product of American hustle, playing for big stakes and his mind sharp on the game, yet ready for an evening's enjoyment, and still no loser in the race since in this hare-like diversion he took the tortoise with him! Such must have been the type Kipling had in mind when he wrote of the "embarrassed gods," for, did the occasion arise, Hebbon felt certain that Pendleton would blandly offer St. Peter a drink and take a contract for repaving the golden streets, to be subsequently relet with a wide margin of profit. His wandering attention was arrested by a sentence from Pendleton's lips:

"It was then we became engaged."

The girl laughed back at him across her glass.

"I had forgotten it," she said, "but I do not deny the allegation."

"Only for the night!" Pendleton hastily protested with an air of playful deprecation; he had a reputation as a non-marrying man to uphold, and besides his fortune was not yet secure!

It was a too-sudden eddy of thought and threatened shipwreck. Hebbon felt a cold draught in the genial atmosphere, and Mrs. Martin-Brown must have felt something of the kind for she looked up hastily and plunged, with good intentions but considerable splash, right into the middle of the conversation. Pendleton's words in spite of the intended banter had missed fire. It had been almost a snub, but, turning to catch the interjected remark from the older lady, he did not see the momentary straight, cold look with which Miss Munroe searched him. With just the suspicion of a shrug and the air of dismissing a trifle she replied:

"Just as you like, of course—but that leaves a vacancy on the staff," and with an infinite amusement in her eyes she turned to the man on her left. "Perhaps Mr. Hebbon will consent to fill the breach."

The challenge was accompanied by the sweetest smile in the world and left him no choice but to bow in exaggerated gallantry, and express his entire willingness, the while admiring her graceful tact in insisting on the fun of the thing and ignoring all unpleasantness. But his ready acquiescence inspired her with a fresh joy and a new idea; he was evidently a man who could play to a strong lead and once discovered it was a temptation to try him—besides, it would be fun to punish Pendleton just a little. There was a witch's dance in her eyes as she launched the experiment:

"That is all very well, but man and superman being such uncertain quantities I think we should have it in writing."

She pushed the order pad and a pencil toward him, but the man also scented game; he recognised her as "a hard one to follow and the devil to beat." He saw, too, her desire to tease Pendleton and was willing to meet her more than half way, but he sought to find her limit.

"Anything you write I'll sign," was all he vouched.

She reached for the block of paper, and after a moment's thought, wrote rapidly and without hesitation, and pushed it across to him. It read:

"We, the undersigned, being in our right minds, do hereby agree to become affianced husband and wife, each to the other, respectively.

"Athol Harding Munroe."

Amused by the evident striving for legal form he put a plain "John Hebbon" under her name, and passed it over to the witnesses. Amid much protest they signed it, Pendleton demurring particularly at the second clause, and Hebbon found her limit when in answer to his request for the custody of the paper she playfully shook her head.

"I am going to keep it as evidence in a suit for breach of promise!"

"But I am more likely to be the plaintiff."

"In that event I shall have to bribe Sir John, for all those cases are tried in his court."

As the hour was already late they decided to ignore the claim of the one fashionable theatre, where a popular star was nightly crowding the house, and to try their fortitude with the questionable delights of a melodrama.

"I know the man who wrote it and I want to see if it is as bad as they all say!" had been Miss Munroe's conclusive reason, and as they were all in the mood for the unconventional thing, a very little coaxing and a judicious reminder from the girl that "no one will be there," soon won over the demurring chaperon. In the short walk to the theatre the little party fell into a natural division. "You must not separate fiancées," had been the verdict, and the host looked as though his punishment were excessive.

The alleged "badness" proved to be all a matter of style unrelieved by any but the most patently moral situations, with anti-liquor strongly in the lead, and the party of four assumed, with the unconscious egotism of the well dressed, that the character of the play permitted conversation; so, when they left the theatre Hebbon and Miss Munroe knew something more of each other. Athol felt a strong liking for this big man in the great yellow fur coat, as he escorted her back to the hotel for supper. At the door, drawing himself up to his full height, he said:

"I would have you know that I am ambitious!" and although the words were only a piece of the absurd acting of the evening, a new interest was born in her; she recognised force.

"What are your ambitions?" she asked.

But he shook his head; already they were crossing the rotunda.

"One does not tell all his secrets!" he said, and she recognised wisdom.

With the greeting of the others they were whirled back from the border land of the serious, into the old strain. Miss Munroe declared she had lost the document, and when, after a frantic search it was found in her glove, Hebbon reached out his hand, and producing a pen and a blank page from a letter, took a copy of it. This time the girl did not object, she even suffered the original to be rewritten in ink and both signed and witnessed. Then because they had been doing the evening in a "Arty and Arriett" style, the ladies insisted on going home in the car. Pendleton continued to give his whole attention to Mrs. Martin-Brown and the other two played a pretty game of repartee, each taking advantage of the other to introduce their new relation.

"I am going to England in the spring if I can find the right travelling companion," she had remarked. And his reply had been:

"Come with me in April and the difficulty is solved."

"I cannot possibly leave before the first of May," she replied, carelessly casting on any dissenting date.

"Very well, it is for you to say when, and I will be on hand."

"You will never come!" she bantered.

"Wait and see."

"I have always yearned for Nevada."

"We won't have to live in Nevada." There was an odd light in his eyes which shocked her into something like sincerity as she replied:

"Oh! but you will take me with you when you go?"

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