



T H E

## THIRTEEN WEEKS

A Romance in Three Chapters

By VIOLET IRWIN



## RESUME OF CHAPTERS I AND II.

This story by a Canadian writer describes an episode in the life of Miss Athol Munroe, a vivacious young lady who was cool enough to dare men to become engaged to her. One of these was a Mr. Pendleton, who held an option on a big Cobalt property and was trying to sell said option and make a fortune. Another was a visiting engineer from the United States, also interested in the same mining deal. On the first occasion that Miss Munroe met Hebdon they signed an agreement to become "affianced husband and wife." Their bantering went so far that the lady made a false step—she asked the man to kiss her at parting. This made a doubtful impression upon Hebdon, who, until this occurrence, seemed to be greatly impressed with the bright and witty young lady. Athol writes repeatedly to Hebdon after his departure but comes to the conclusion when she receives only one letter, that he regards the evening's "engagement" as a joke.

## III.



THE crisis in her own affairs began to weigh upon Athol to the exclusion of all else. Having run on the rocks herself she was now fully persuaded of the excellence and wisdom of Margaret's course, and had made a flying visit to the country, "Just to see if she could stand it!" Margaret had

smiled over the lengthy telegram that, regardless of expense, explained her coming. It was characteristic of Athol to decide to live on interest now that she had spent the capital.

The first day had passed quickly enough on the wings of intimate talk and gossip; the second as pleasantly in driving about the country; on the third a heavy rain shut them in and it dragged unmistakably, the next crawled to an early and welcome bed hour, and on the fifth day Athol had taken her departure.

"Don't think me altogether horrid," she had said, as they stood on the little station platform, deserted save for themselves and an emaciated mail bag. "It is not that I don't want to stay with you, dear, but I could not live in this place, that is all!"

"No, I see that you could not," the older woman had replied with a touch of wistfulness. For a moment weakness seemed to be in the ascendant; it was very nice and very simple just not to be able to do the disagreeable thing; then her mind jumped ahead to Athol's yet undecided future, that, like a boarding-house menu, offered a limited variety of equally unpalatable provision, and in her own monotonous days tasted the sweets of certainty.

"Let me know what you decide!" she had called through the window, and Athol, sparkling now with the thought of her return to the city, had gaily shouted back:

"My romance may pan out yet, you know! I counted and the first of May is exactly thirteen weeks from the night of our dinner; thirteen has always been my fatal number!"

The train moved out, and Margaret, standing alone, wondered if her little sister was building a castle of hope on the sand. It had only been a little joke, that last remark, she knew, but it proved the thing to be still in her mind, a hovering possibility.

By the end of March Athol had worried herself sick and Mrs. Martin-Brown, seeing how things promised to go, had carried her off for a trip to New York, giving Arthur Dobson the name of their hotel and wisely refraining from mentioning it to her companion. The wily woman knew that wealth is never surer of its strength and attractiveness than amid the surrounding luxury of a great city. It is when things of that kind are before our eyes that we want them most; in Canada, Sherry's and a box at the opera are but pleasant sounds and

memories; in New York they become vital and their possession a necessity.

For the first week Athol had given herself up to gaiety and enjoyment; the shops proved an alternate torment and delight to the impoverished girl, but the evenings, arranged by Mr. Dobson and his accomplice, left nothing to be desired.

Then George had announced his intention of coming to the city, and Athol had not forbidden him. On alien soil they seemed to get away from the laws that bound him, and he was the strongest bulwark in her fast weakening defence against Dobson; the girl realised uneasily that in all their gaiety the latter had been a persistent, and if not desirable, at least an indispensable, figure. But it was not until she was face to face with the other man, that she realised how utterly tiresome he had been.

For this one morning she managed to elude Mrs. Martin-Brown, and met George in the museum; there was hardly a chance of their being discovered, but the possibility added a spice of romance to their meeting, not unacceptable to the girl. Wandering together for an hour in the galleries she was very kind to him, allowing him to hold her hand surreptitiously behind a stone sarcophagus, and even to kiss her beneath the dome of the model Pantheon, more for the fun of the thing than for sentiment!

They drove down Riverside in a pelting rain, welcoming the steamed glass of the hansom as guard against possible recognition by some penetrating and too knowing eye. Like children they built a house of cards and dreamed a promised land and at last, grown bold, lunched together at Martin's. Wit mingled with their wine and the perfect, understanding sympathy between them gave a rare flavour to the simple meal. In answer to his devotion she found in herself a greater tenderness than she had ever before confessed; so for the moment they lived en Espagne.

The quest of a necessary trifle took them across Twenty-Third Street and into one of the larger stores, and as Athol crossed the door the house of cards, that had for the past hour seemed so secure a dwelling, fell scattering about her feet; Spain vanished with its rainbow tinted landscape; all at once they were back in the throbbing heart of the big American city, and not ten feet in front of her stood Mrs. Martin-Brown!

As a physical or mental shock may bring a man suddenly from under the influence of alcohol, the evidence of her sight dashed the intoxication of her dream forever; without an exclamation or sign of any kind that might have attracted attention, the girl turned and swiftly left the place, followed in amazement by George, who had not seen the all too familiar figure intent upon her purchase.

It was over, and all danger diverted for the present. For one moment the girl had seen herself suspended over the pit of social annihilation, she had felt as a criminal feels fleeing from justice, and the dream was done. Mrs. Martin-Brown was a good and tried friend, but also a woman of the old school of absolute conventionality. She knew George, knew his wife, and all the commonplace, unhappy story of two personalities at variance, of discord, dissent, and as one wore on the other, almost enmity, and knowing all her eyes would have been very quick to seize on the significance of his appearance with Athol, and to condemn it; and to be condemned by Mrs. Martin-Brown was, in the social pool of their city, to be lost.

Yet even in the horror of her first shock Athol could not help being amused to find, so keen had been the perception of her senses in that one second, she even knew that Henriette was at the time buying a pair of tan silk hose. She and George could laugh in their ultimate safety, but the afternoon was spoiled the flavour gone and each was secretly relieved when a tea appointment made it necessary for her to go. The girl smiled wearily and wisely when she found she was ten minutes early; romances are all very well, but the real castle in Spain is apt to be damp and unventilated.

They stayed in New York longer than they had intended, one link in the chain of amusement being hardly completed before another was in the forge, and it was not until the very last days of April that Athol reached home. Without giving any reason she had insisted on being back before the first of May, for now the date was approaching it had begun to haunt her; reason forbade her but she still cherished a hope.

Since that one happy day with George the monotony of Arthur Dobson had seemed more than ever dreadful to her; but money was fearfully low with her now, and she had unconsciously set this date as the deciding point. After the first of May there seemed only days—an interminable number of days and years, a great darkness with only the candle light of his possible coming to relieve it. How small that chance was she did not dare to say to herself, or rather she had told herself a hundred times that there was no chance, none whatever, and yet on the morning of the first persisted in waking up with a feeling of expectation; and as she lay collecting her dream-scattered thoughts, suddenly the date smote with a white light on her mind. She shut her eyes and tried to make time pass, then rose reluctantly and dressed, consuming as long as possible in the operation. It was going to be an endless day, and she had kept herself free from engagements on purpose.

She remained indoors all morning, calling herself a silly goose, for who but the most ardent lover would come so early? Yet every ring brought her to the head of the stairs with a listening ear. After lunch she took some work and sat in the window, but never had work seemed less interesting; as time went on her hands trembled with expectation and her ears ached with listening, and all the time she was calling herself a silly goose, till the clock began to tick it out with its wig-wag tongue, and she almost fancied that it pointed a derisive hand at her: "Silly goose, silly goose, silly goose!"

No man would come on such an errand after ignoring her letters, but if he did not come he might write, and she could hardly keep still when on the last mail she saw the carrier come up to the door. She seized eagerly the envelope the maid brought but it was only a bluish-white, oblong and very thin, and loudly proclaimed its nature without the address of her milliner in the upper corner. It was a large bill she knew and she preferred not to look at it just now; so she waited, and soon her heart began to ache with a dying hope. It was already half-past five and if he did not come by six she must give him up; her hands lying idly in her lap, she began to wonder if after all she had cared for the man.

The mere chance of evading Arthur Dobson for a thing possibly worse would surely not make her feel like this. With all her romantic tendency she had not gone the length of believing in love at first sight, but perhaps love did not wait to be believed in; after all she might be in love, not with the man, but with the image of him she had created in her own brain. What if he stood in the door now and was unlike her vision of him? She was afraid for a moment, but could he be less attractive to her than Dobson?

Athol began to pace the floor and to think hard. They were grim thoughts; luck had been against her always, this time she had played on the wrong colour and played the fool into the bargain, and thinking of Dobson she began to be a little bit uneasy about that foolish little contract. What, she wondered, had Hebdon done with the paper? Pish!—chucked it into the waste-paper basket and her letters after it! She looked at the clock and found it five minutes to the hour, then she began to walk about again and to think of Dobson, but even estimating the convenience of his wealth and his great devotion to herself failed to hide or to reflect a glory on his dullness. She could find no objection to him, only that he was too nice; and tomorrow he would come and sit just so in the arm-chair as he had sat before, and tell her of his love