

THE THANKSGIVING MATINÉE

By Virginia Tracy

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. GRAHAM COOTES



HE Regnaults had been in hard luck. It was going to be better now, or, at least, they had thought so an hour ago; for the moment they could think of nothing but the black hate which had blotted out their love. They were young, and their love had been more important to them than any question of dark or golden fortune. But it seemed to each of them, now, that the other had killed it. As they had to get to the matinée at once they made allowances for life being carried on, for the moment, just as it used to be. But, after the matinée, they really did not see what was to be done with it!

Provisionally, therefore, Barbara—a tall girl, lovely as Diana, but with the round chin, the serious clear brows of a good child—Barbara continued, in all the triumphantly abased self-righteousness of her sex, to kneel beside the lumpy sofa of their lodging, and to transfer from it to Tony's suit-case those various and mutually uncongenial articles which are somehow never ready to be sent in any actor's trunk to any first performance. Tony could pack better than she, but Barbara was not one lightly to resign the responsibilities of wifehood.

So there was nothing for Tony to do but to walk up and down, humming "The Road to Mandalay"—a tune of which his wife was extremely weary. He did not do this out of mere callous braggadocio, but because he had to sing that song in his new part and he was afraid of it.

For though Barbara was still out of work, Tony was to open with Klein & Henshaw's resplendent, almost spectacular, production of "the international melodrama, 'Her Father's Daughter,'" that very afternoon. It was a point that rankled against Barbara in both their breasts that she, a professional, had allowed him to quarrel with her at such a moment.

She comforted herself with thinking how it only showed to what suffering had reduced her! She might almost as well have been an outsider!

The truth was that if that much-heralded, eagerly awaited production had not decided to open in New York with a Thanksgiving matinée, waiving the usual out-of-town trial in favor of four dress rehearsals in a theatre closed for the purpose, the Regnaults would not have quarrelled at all. Actors are paid for performances, even out of town. But they are not paid for rehearsals, no matter how dressy. So Barbara had supposed Tony was down to his last cent, and had considerably refrained from speaking to him about her seat for the matinée, which, nevertheless, up to this very morning, she had wistfully, madly clung to the hope of his casually producing. Surely, he must have got her a seat somehow, if he had only begged a very bad one out of the management! Instead of that, what had he done?

Tony's connection with that international melodrama had been, from the beginning, a peculiarly intricate and nerve-racking business.

As far back as the preceding May, when that bewildering ill-luck which seemed to have fallen upon them almost with their marriage was already of a winter's standing, he had heard of "Her Father's Daughter," as a play containing a "leading juvenile." That is to say, the first male part, the character of the middle-aged money-king, was a "heavy" lead. Therefore, the suitor of the money-king's daughter, being the hero of the love interest, divided honors and became a "juvenile" or "light" lead. Now this was exactly what Tony was looking for. He was too young to play "straight" leads—heroes who permit no dividing of honors.

So as soon as Tony heard about that international juvenile he spent three weeks

in trying to get himself seen by those in authority, and at last he got himself seen. Then Klein, one of the two managers, said that he hadn't a doubt Regnault could play the part, but it was the character of an English officer and he wasn't the type. The author said the officer was not English, but Irish, and that Mr. Regnault was exactly the type; but that the part was such a great part that it could hardly be handled by a Henry Irving mingled with Coquelin, plus the appearance of George Alexander in his first youth; naturally, therefore, Mr. Regnault—at his age—could hardly have had adequate experience for it. The other manager, Henshaw, said that the part was only the second part, anyhow, and there was hardly anything to it that he couldn't take any nicely dressed young fellow out of the dramatic school and get his director to train him into; so he certainly wasn't going to be crazy enough to pay any leading man's salary for it. And the director said that there was only one man in the profession who could play that part. That was a man who had stood by the director in stock for six summers, and he might be a little elderly and not one of your pretty boys, but by G—, he knew his business!

But when they had tried four other men in the first three weeks of rehearsal the manager that had believed in Tony's acting but not his type sent for him. "Tell you what it is, Regnault," Klein had said, "the part's not much, for all the trouble we've had with it. But every doggone one of them falls down on a little, no-account love scene that a few years ago a manager'd have cut right out, author or no author. You know the scene—it's that devilish 'Mandalay' business!"

Tony nodded.

"What's the use of a sort of comedy vaudeville stunt in the middle of a serious situation like that? Here this girl's quarrelled with the fellow she's engaged to when he's on the eve of sailing with his regiment"—the manager pronounced this last phrase with the happy ease of one to whom it has been made familiar by innumerable dramas—"and she's breaking her heart, and all that. Well, then, when he finds her alone in that tent, at that military garden-aprty, why don't they have a good strong scene where he can prove to

her he's innocent?—something you can get your teeth into, as Pinero says. But no! She's got to say will he please leave her alone, because she's running over that song for the amateur theatricals to-morrow night and she finds it very difficult. And he's got to say he's afraid the fellow that's to do it with her, in his place, hasn't made the specialty of it that he has, and he would be glad to give her a few pointers. And that's where my trouble begins."

Again Tony nodded.

"He's got to sing and he's got to—well, not dance exactly, but sort of walk to time; kind of chassé round, you'll have to. You see, there has to be something to it, for the girl to keel over into his arms at the end of it, and fight her father to a finish, and follow him out to the African desert and all that. Because, *why should she?* You aren't even made to understand why she takes him back. There isn't any proof, there isn't any climax, nothing but lahdy-da! Nothing builds up toward the row with the father, and the end of the act goes flat every time. *There's nothing there!*"

He sighed. Tony felt a little depressed.

"The author thinks so much of the hero's love-making, while he's singing, I thought at first I'd try letting the singing go and getting a man that could *act*. Then I thought I'd let the acting slide and get some fellow with a voice that could just regularly *sing*. But"—"But now," Tony had reported to Barbara, "I gather that, as a last resort from failing celebrities, he has decided to try somebody who can neither act *nor* sing!"

For singing, Tony had a clear, true voice of very little compass, no great training, and no experience whatever in public use. He began to be fidgety, erratic, and extremely ill to live with.

Barbara had borne with him like an angel—no, like a wife and a professional—until this morning.

This morning, after three weeks of being snubbed and snapped at and relied upon; and frozen out by silence and eagerly appealed to; and adored and praised and petted and made love to and forgotten about; and treated as if it were her fault when the tailor sent home anything which didn't fit, or when her lord forgot a word in the lines she was continually hearing

him—after three weeks of enduring, in addition to the tearing sympathies of her own hope, all the agitations and caprices of the artistic temperament on the rack, she had been standing in her mended, slinky petticoat and shrunken dressing-sack, worn out, herself, with sleeplessness, suspense, apprehension, and the slow, crackling fire of the climax that approached, washing their breakfast dishes in the basin.

Tony, driven off from wiping them because he hurried her, was dressing and wandering up and down while he dressed, singing that tune which lately had been so constantly on his lips that it seemed to have come in between all their confidences. A choking and bumping sound and a faint smoke forced their way through the long undisturbed dust of the register, as if the cold and dead furnace were exhaling its own ghost. The smoke was followed by a smart, shaking-up rattle, and Tony, already jumpy, started and dropped his collar-button.

As, after a considerable interval, he reappeared with it from under the unmade bed, he remarked, "Well, thank Heaven for one thing! Whether I pull it off this afternoon or whether I get my notice, we'll eat no dinner in this mess! We'll go to a decent restaurant and give thanks in a bottle of good champagne!"

She looked up at him without moving. "And where will you get the money?" she inquired.

"Oh, I've got money enough for that, you bet!—I've been saving it all along."

Not until she could do it calmly, with proper self-control, did she say to him—over her shoulder, but in a voice to which Medea's must have been jocular—"And did you have money for champagne all the time that you didn't buy me a seat for your opening?"

"You were so precious careful not to betray the slightest interest in my opening—never to mention going to it, nor even to come to any of the rehearsals—that I supposed you didn't want a seat for it."

She was unbraiding her hair and she took up her brush which shook in her hand. "Of course," she said, "it never occurred to you that I stayed away from rehearsals because I didn't want them all to see how old my suit was." Her voice broke. "Goodness knows, I've tried hard

enough to make some money myself—" As if at a signal, both volcanoes broke into violent eruption and chaos reigned.

Yes, it had begun about a theatre seat; but, once started, it had dragged with a wide net. Old scratches, overlooked when given, suddenly became inflamed and were exhibited as festering wounds. This was the first serious quarrel they had had since their marriage, and it is safe to say that by the time they paused to see what they had left out they had got in everything.

They had no idea whatever that nobody had done anything to any one except unconsciously to bear witness with the poet that life is thorny and youth is vain; also that no overwhelming amount of tranquillity and justice may be expected from two proud, emotional, and highly strung people, of no great mutual experience, who have been suddenly cooped up together for nearly a year of inexplicable bad luck: false alarms and deferred hope which work like madness in the brain. Worked, in fact, to the point of Barbara's answering Tony's last remark—that still he failed to see what she gained for either of them by having made him so self-conscious about that damnable song that he didn't know how he should get through it at all—by saying that if it had come to a point where she was interfering with his career, which she knew well was all he cared about, she would better go to-morrow, as soon as she had seen him through these two performances, and visit her sister in the New Rochelle stock. She thought very likely she could get work there.

To which he made answer: "As everything I say or do appears to become more distasteful to you every moment, perhaps that would be best for all parties."

And at that, indeed, they paused, terrified, looking in silence, with blank astonishment, at a sudden gulf, and saying inwardly, amazedly, "Is this I? Am I saying this?"

So that Barbara, with a feeling of throwing a line which he must accept, and folding, somewhat ostentatiously, an extra dress-shirt, added the pacific remark: "Of course, if the piece succeeds, you won't need me. You can afford a dresser then."

Oddly enough, he was not softened by this. He replied, "I hope so!"

Ah! Not only had he slighted her

housekeeping and ceased to value her companionship, but he didn't like the way she was getting him ready for his part! "Perhaps it would be better, then, if I stayed away from your performance this afternoon altogether!"

"Just as you prefer, of course."

Now they both knew perfectly well that she could not possibly stay away that afternoon, because she had to help him in his quick change. Even had she been sitting in front—like all the other wives!—she would have had to come back to his dressing-room for that.

"Very well. As soon as your change is over, I'll go. I can get the five-o'clock train. If I make you so nervous about your song, I'll be better out of your way."

"Where will you get your dinner?"

"Dinner! I don't want any dinner."

"Well, I'm afraid I shall want mine."

"I don't doubt it!"

"You don't wish me to take you to the station, then?"

"I can go to the station by myself." His dinner, indeed! He had only mentioned it to show her how little he cared what she did! "You know—if I do go—I'll never—come back!"

"That's for you to say."

Then the silence fell again, more dividing and more definite than ever.

Was it necessary that he should presently break it by going on singing:

"I've a neater, sweeter maiden,
In a cleaner, greener land—"

With a sinking and a shuddering sense of the approaching hour, the captain, the Honorable Larry, came to a pause. He stood gnawing a twitching lip and breathing greedily the mild, bright air that crept in between the smudged starch of the window-curtains. Out of the Babes' Club, opposite, all bright with window-boxes and boys in buttons, actors issued debonairly, going to matinées which they had safely played; or they went in to luncheon. Trying to steady himself while his boiling rage against his wife contended shrilly, convulsively in his pounding heart, against the mounting, dizzying tension claimed by the Honorable Larry, he fixedly watched people in holiday dress stepping through the thin, wintry sunshine, many of them carrying little blue or crimson flags. A tally-ho sped past with flourishing bugles.

And as Barbara shut the suit-case the remembrance that it was a day of festival washed into her breast like a flood, and her magnificent, statuesque calm gave way to an innocent, a miserable blubber.

Now, if at that moment Tony had yielded to impulse, he would have dropped down and taken his wife in his arms and crushed the poor, drowned, swollen loveliness of her dear, discolored face in between his shoulder and his own cold, nervous cheek. But when one's love has been denied, one's honor questioned, and one's motives impugned, one must not yield to impulse. One feels that, somehow, everything depends upon not yielding to it!—So Tony merely fastened the straps of his suit-case and took up his hat.

Barbara rose to her feet, fetched her own wraps, and began fumbling with them. He said to her, in a tone of marble and of martyred civility, "Do you intend to bathe your face?" But while she was bathing it he lost control of himself and called, "I've got to get out of this! Wait for you on the steps."

Barbara, coming out of the wash-closet with her features somewhat reduced in size and tint, looked about her for something to carry. She would have enjoyed staggering under his suit-case, but she knew she need not hope that this could be. He had, of course, taken it. But he had gratifyingly forgotten his straw hat; it was pinned up in brown paper, having been cleaned last night. As she appeared with this at the front door, Tony ran down the steps; and Barbara, sucking down the frayed finger-end of a glove which she had not had time to mend, deplorably followed him.

At the theatre no one would ever have dreamed that it was really afternoon. Nothing so fresh and clear as daylight could penetrate that smouldering electric atmosphere through which innumerable, tingling nerves confused and pricked each other as if with wireless messages sent broadcast through the murky air. The nightmare of the Regnaults' personal relations was only deepened by this more inclusive nightmare.

"Half-hour!"

Already! Tony began to worry because the villain's cigarette-case, which he had to use in the first act, had not been sent

him; and Barbara flew zealously down into the hubbub of the stage, set for the duke's deer park, after the property-man. The leading woman—a "society" recruit, and still something of an outsider—sent a bunch of violets up to Mrs. Regnault "so she sha'n't be jealous of the beautiful way her husband makes love to me"; and "Amateur!" thought Barbara, in scorn. A friendly young Englishman stopped to borrow a match and wish Tony luck; Barbara handed him the matches and returned the grip of his hand. For though she was leaving Tony in an hour, he was none the less opening in a new part now. And a new part is a new part. Nothing can change that.

"Fifteen minutes!"

"Overture!" He was gone. "Overture!"

She was no whit immune from the strain of that call, the contagion of that excitement. There it came, the ominous, gay leaping of the overture itself!

"First act! First act! Everybody down to begin!"

Oh, heavens, the curtain music!

She tingled not only for Tony but the play—"the piece," she called it, as one might say the ship, the regiment. "How's the piece going?" she would ask, as some one came up or down the stairs. "Well, it seems to be going kind of slow." Slow? Dreadful idea! Slow! "The audience's friendly enough, but the darn thing's got to get a gait on it!"

By the second act they were beginning to say that it was swaddled in scenery. "If they had a few less real deer and real motor-cars and a little more real action——"

"Your scene's going pretty well, Regnault?"

"Hm—hm," assented Tony, his quick change safely accomplished, revolving into the sash of which Barbara held one end.

"During mine," commented the loiterer on the threshold, "they were sitting on ice. You've got a laugh or two and the love interest."

"Well," said Tony, with a preoccupied smile, "in the third-act desert you've got a camel. That ought to help some!"

He stood back from the glass surveying the light and gallant figure that shone there in military glory, amending a touch of make-up, altering the set of his cap, the

knot of his sash. His eyes searched the picture that he made about as personally, with about as much vanity, as a jockey tests his saddle-girth or a fencer bends his foil. Every nerve of his slender strength was pulled together for action; every gleam of his elastic spirit signalled him from eyes almost black with excitement and reported itself ready all along the line. But his touch, generally so warm and swift, was cold as ice.

Quietly, so as not to jar him more than need be, Barbara told him, "I'll leave all your third-act things laid out so you can get into them easily by yourself."

"Thank you!"

After that she couldn't have stayed if she had wanted to!

"Second act!" Barbara closed her eyes and then she heard him running down the stairs.

She went quietly about, picking up his first-act clothes, which he had left scattered all over the room, and laying out, as she had promised, his desert rags and bandages. Soon there was nothing more to do. She was not aware of any emotion. She put on her jacket and gloves, and was just going, when she found that she had forgotten her hat. She got it and stood drawing out the pins, and then she knew that she was going to have a crying spell.

Hastily she closed the door; she was so shaken by the sudden storm that she had to sit down and let her head drop into her arms and weep and weep. When she had exhausted herself with crying and with her efforts to cease crying, suddenly she heard a strange sound.

It was a crashing, banging sound with an extraordinary vibrating shake in it. The first terror of every one in a theatre is fire. Barbara leaped to the door and flung it open. The noise engulfed her at the threshold, holding her quiet in its stormy night. But it was not fire; it was only tremendous applause.

To this applause there was a kind of heart of laughter—not mirth, but excited pleasure; it was like a joyous wind banging and clattering in its course. Barbara had never before heard anything like it—at least not with mortal ears. But in the hearing of one's first youth there is always such a sound: the sound of fame, the sound of public welcome, the sound of the great successes of all time, of that fabulous

first night which shines so far, mirage and siren song of a million legends. And Barbara knew it when she heard it, as Juliet knew the voice of Romeo. She said, "Somebody has made the hit of their life!"

She couldn't stir; she couldn't think. In that world of madly advertised camels, marching regiments, and real steam-boats, no speculation as to what might have caught the audience's fancy crossed her mind. Merely warmed and consoled to the bone by the delicious bedlam—as his own language consoles a man in a strange land—she stood there with growing, brightening eyes and faster beating pulse; and then, through the uproar, through the lessening, hushing surge, rising to assert itself, came thinly the notes of a familiar tune—

"For the temple bells are callin' and it's there that I would be——"

Her heart seemed to stop; her mouth opened, but no breath came.

"By the old Moulmein pagoda——"

"Oh!" she said. "Oh!—It's for Tony!"

Her knees shook, and she sat down on the stairs.

She did not know how long she sat there, in the half-darkness, as the music and the plaudits rose and fell. She did not consider that all this was nothing to her. The scene below was hidden from her by the walls of the set, the sides of the vast tent which covered the whole stage and shut the action completely from the view of any one behind the scenes. But she could hear well enough, and she let her head sink back against the banisters, half-listening and half-drifting in a luxurious maze. The tears that she had thought all spent poured from her tired eyes with a sweetness of relief like the tranquil, idle bliss of convalescence. The strain was over! He had won! He was riding a willing horse—and to what an undreamed victory!

"On the road to Mandalay
Where the old Flotilla lay——"

Sweet and daring his voice rose up to her; warm with color, thrilling with languid fire and high confidence, and, for all its correct cockney aspirates, adorably, imitatively touched with the softly broadening vowels, the winning, wistful, fleeting cadence that came by right to Tony from his Irish mother; but, trusting every-

thing to rhythm and the lyric lift and fall, used rather by an actor than a singer.

"With our sick beneath the awnings when we
went to Mandalay!
Oh, the road to Mandalay——"

Barbara began to be aware along what lines the Honorable Larry was conducting his unacknowledged wooing; to yield a little to the current of that floating, sensuous, questing, teasing melody, which reached her then like the call of all adventurous love, far countries, and the world of which we wonder—

"Where the flyin' fishes play——"

Oh, yes, he was doing it sensuously; yes, he was doing it dreamily! But with how fresh and keen and swift a sense, how bold a dream, all shot with sun and air and salty spray, with shine of sand, with wide, hot winds and open spaces! Was this what he had been humming while she did the dishes?

There was no stain of its origin upon it. It was the flash of foam on a wave, of a feather in the breeze or a bird in the air. It was impulse in its spring-time, it was blitheness exulting and youth come into its own; it was embodied joy. Never by one waiver in its foot-fall of high fortune did it betray the austere and giddy concentration with which any mortal must pull himself together before he can let himself go, utterly, upon the tide of lightness of heart. But she, who had sought to divide and claim his attention, she knew.

The song seemed to mount triumphant on a lifting wave—

"An' the dawn comes up like thunder out o'
China 'crost the bay!"

That was the finale.

Volley after volley crashed its breakers over the foot-lights; the prolonged, persistent encore of an audience determined to get what it wants. Didn't they know, out there, that this wasn't a musical comedy?—that this was a play and they were trying to stop its action? They neither knew nor cared. The heart of Barbara, the injured wife, shouted in her, "Oh, glory!"

She fancied that she could hear Tony trying to speak his next line; she was almost sure of the high shriek to which the leading woman trusted her reply. The or-



Drawn by F. Graham Coates.

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chestra struck up a cue for "laughs outside," repeated it, and gave up, vanquished. Barbara, running along her little landing, pressed herself against the brick wall of the proscenium arch which ended it. She stood, then, almost on a parallel line with the foot-lights, though far above them; and she could see down, across the stage, into the prompt entrance, where the stage-manager had begun to jump up and down, snapping his fingers to the leader of the orchestra, signalling, "Let 'em have it, then! Let 'em have it! Strike up!"

And though she was only waiting a suitable moment to leave Tony, something leaped in Barbara's breast, knocking and thumping louder than the applause that quivered through her like the thrill of a brass band. Opposite her, and close to the foot-lights, she could see a mere tiny, narrow strip of stage, and into this little blazing strip, of a sudden, Tony flashed. She caught, as he turned sidewise to the audience, the hilarious, incredulous twinkle of his eye. Barbara took hold of the little railing in front of her and clutched it tight.

There was a pause, a stir, a swell of music. Tony extended his hand, beating time for the lovers' rehearsal—

"For the wind is in the palm-trees, and the temple bells they say:

Come you back, you British soldier, come you back to Mandalay!"

They had got what they wanted! They were making him do it all over again!

Oh, that strange tune, the lilt of it, the ache of it!—its mingled strain played about Barbara's heart, crooning, coaxing, commanding, suggesting. And the heiress, too, had risen from the chair which he had placed for her. She had joined him. She was moving with him in the sort of swinging step which the Honorable Larry must show his sweetheart how to do with the man who was taking his place. And as they balanced the one before the other, it was in wholly recovered confidence that he bent his cajoling head to hers—

"Her petticoat was yellor an' her little cap was green,

And her name was Supi-yaw-lat, jes' the same as Thebaw's queen——"

Heavens, what a song! What a lover! What a caress of buoyant motion! The rhythm of their step swayed out of Bar-

bara's sight. But she knew too well the often-discussed "business of the scene" not to be able to follow it. It had taken possession of her. As she stood there with lowered eyes it was she whom her soldier wooed within the hot, bright tent, all flower-laden, surrounded by the deep, aromatic dusk and summer night that opened into India and El Dorado. She had never had such surroundings for her own love story, but she had them then.

"Bloomin' idol made o' mud
Wot they call the great gawd Budd——"

Oh, he was bold enough now! They had stepped apart, but he was drifting forward and back with the drifting music, persuading his lady to try again; he was holding out his hand, and she, coming slowly toward him, allowed hers to creep forward. At the same moment Barbara's own hand seemed to lie, first passive and then clinging, in his grasp.

"Plucky lot she cared for idols, when I kissed her——"

Barbara closed her eyes and felt his kiss on her own mouth.

"When the mist was on the rice-fields an' the sun was droppin' slow,
She'd git 'er little banjo and she'd sing Kulla-lo-lo!

With 'er arm upon my shoulder and 'er cheek agin' my cheek——"

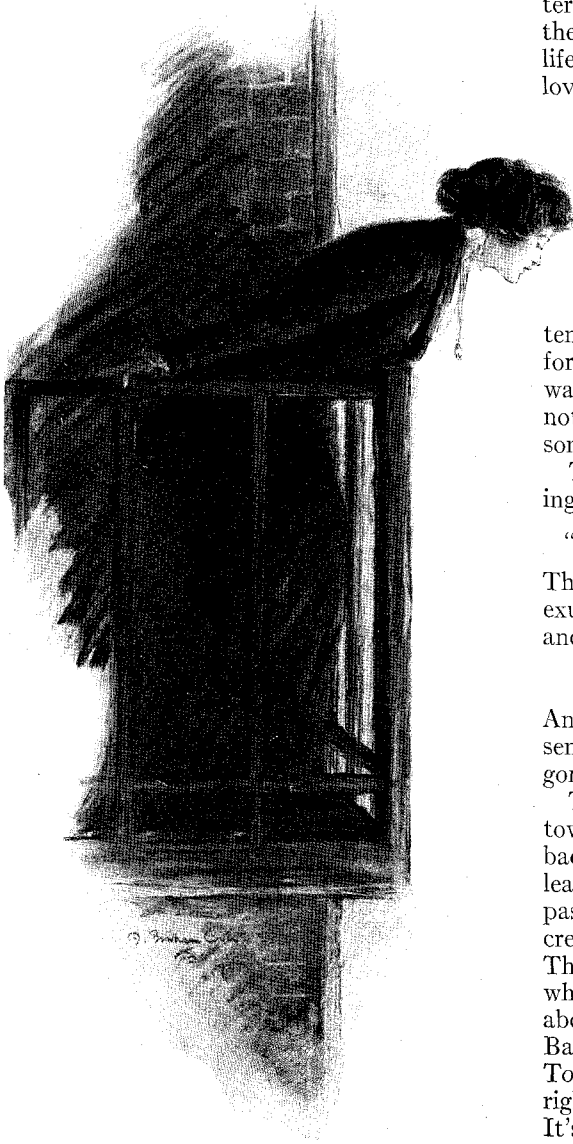
The heiress was back in her chair and her lover had flung himself beside her, with her arm upon his shoulder and his cheek against her cheek—

"Where the silence hung that 'eavy you was 'arf afraid to speak!"

In her dusky, lofty corner, Barbara felt the need neither to speak nor to move. She saw neither the tented walls nor the line of the foot-lights. Her trouble crept further and further back and was lost upon the road to Mandalay.

"No! you won't 'eed nothin' else
But them spicy garlic smells,
And the sunshine and the palm-trees
And the tinkly temple bells——"

She was alone with Tony, with his touch and his voice and the call of the music, that throbbing, lulling, soothing, maddening melody that rocked her senses as if it took her on its breast; while close to hers



She could see a mere tiny, narrow strip of stage.—
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the boyishness of his dark head, the clear smile of his eyes, the eager challenge of his lips were the only things she saw. No cajolery nor dalliance in that singing now! Pure flame, pure feeling, midsummer madness, and all the joy of life!

"If you've 'eard the East a-callin' you, you won't never 'eed naught else!"

It didn't matter about the ticket! It didn't matter about the quarrel! It only mat-

tered that out of the jar and the fret and the daily grind he had brought back to her life's magic and the youth of their lost first love! What was it that the manager had said?—"There isn't anything there . . . there's no proof, no reason . . . you never understand why the girl takes him back——"

The music was rising toward the finale. The Honorable Larry was swinging backward with his chorus toward the curtains of the tent. And the heiress, who had but informally surrendered, was watching the way he would make the exit, if he—and not that other man—were going to do the song with her.

The house was very still, leaning, watching, taut and tense and hardly breathing—

"An' the dawn comes up like thunder——"

That was the deep, swelling note, secure, exultant, profoundly masculine, of farewell and pastures new—

"Out o' China crost the bay!"

And he was gone! There was the instant's sense of a desolate and empty tent, a stage gone dead.

Then the rush of the repentant heiress toward the curtains, calling, "Oh, come back, you British soldier!" And then the leap of the young, the almost laughing passion in those two flushed and radiant creatures meeting in each other's arms. They stood thus "holding the picture" while the applause rocked and roared about them. And far off in the darkness Barbara was saying into his breast, "Oh, Tony! Oh, Tony, all right, all right, all right! I forgive you! Oh, forgive me! It's over now and I understand! And everything's all right!"

She did not know how many times he sang or bowed an encore, nor how the big scene went; as far as she was concerned, the calls at the end of the act might have blended with that first deluge. Until at length she noticed that, all the ensembles being over, everybody but the leading woman and the heavy lead—who remained bowing and bowing as the curtain rose and fell—was bolting from the stage for the dressing-rooms.

Barbara ran to the head of the stairs to catch Tony's eye with consolation as he

came up. As soon as he saw her he would know that she had chosen to stay and all was well.

Bounding up the steps, he was caught in a swarm of supers, and as he made his way amongst them there came through the redoubled violence of applause the voice of the assistant stage-manager calling Tony's name. Instantly the shout for him seemed to come from everywhere.

For the audience was insisting that Tony come forward alone, like a full-fledged star, to take his call. The stage-hands grinned, and the pausing, peering, crowding company stood a-tiptoe and applauded in the entrances, jibing at him as he passed, "Hustle up, king of the carnival!" or "There's a hot time in the old town to-day!" The heavy lead said, well, of course, he didn't pretend to be a song-and-dance artist himself! And the heavy villain said, of course, if he'd known that he was engaged to support a *star*! The deer parks and the deserts, the steamboats and the camels were neglected and unthought of; the managers were wondering how much they would have to raise Regnault's salary to keep him; the critics were already planning their tale of the man who, at a Thanksgiving *matinée* doomed to pass into a legend, had leaped into fame and fortune merely by walking about a stage and singing a song, when that friendly English boy screeched out to Barbara as he passed her, "Well, how about it? What price our Tony now?" . . . Then, and not till then, did Barbara wonder with what countenance she was to declare her change of heart! She had quarrelled with Tony in the dead and gone hour ago of his obscurity. Was she to throw herself into his arms at his success?

Through the medley, out past the curtain, before the audience went Tony. What would the first stare of his surprise as he saw her say to her when he came back? How would he take it? What could she say to him? Perhaps he would see her as he came off. Would his amazement beam with consolation?—or frown with rage and scorn? She could only wait, while still she felt that crazy house leaning to him, flushed and breathless, warm with the warmth he had lighted in its imagination, stirred with the thousand beating

fancies of the link that he had woven between itself and joy.

It was as if it called out to him with a single voice, to him who had only lightly moved and sung a song. Not Hamlet nor Othello will ever hear quite that wordless cry. If it had had words it might have said: For them that cleanse and heal us, profundity and silence and thanks beyond our sound.

But, to the custodian of delight, to him who can make us forget our age and our weight and our business, to him who—disentangling us from our offices and our marketing, our servant problem and our suburban time-tables—can take us with him on the pagan and the lyric flight of charm, to the creature who comes before us with—simply!—happiness in his hands, we can only cry out, "Give it to us!"

That is what we mean by all this uproar. "Give it to us. We need it so badly. The dryness in our hearts is just as thirsty as if we were all beautiful and young. That fugitive and aerial thing, scattering light and mystery, perfume and freshness, that passes and yet haunts us in a tune, we desire it as keenly as ever some Mercutio did or Columbine, and for a little minute we are quickened with it now! Pour into us all that rapture, all that swiftness, all that glad and winged passion; that instinct for the liberty, the impulses, the motion of life, the color and wildness and sweetness of life, and, before all, that deep, deep agreement, that harmony with life itself! Do not give it to us once, as the other and remoter artists do, give it again and again and again; give it as if you could never be empty and never be weary; fashion it for us, here and now, out of your body and spirit; bring it up from the strength of your heart; weave with the last, last pulse of your vitality the spell that frees us, and—pouring your soul into ours—make us live! "Oh, come back, you British soldier, come you back to Mandalay!"

He did see her as he came off. But where was his surprise? He favored her with a broad wink and waved his hand. She took the truth squarely, fair and true between the eyes. He was not surprised to see her because he had forgotten that she meant to go! The scene that had won back her heart had taken all of his. His

wife, for all he knew, had left him. And he had forgotten it in a song.

"Well, it's been a Thanksgiving *matinée* for us all right!"

Thus innocently spoke the husband, sitting in his dressing-room after the performance, as he rubbed the last traces of make-up from his face. "And now for our dinner-party!"

She was standing, silent, by the make-up shelf. And suddenly he leaned over, drooping his head upon her arm and burrowing his face into her sleeve. "To-night all over again! And a run of hundreds of nights! Oh, Tony's all in, Barbe!" he told her. And still she did not break her silence.

He drew back, lifting his eyes to hers, and very slowly a deep flush began to rise and darken over his face. He put out one hand and took hers. "Darling!" he cried. "To think I should have forgotten that we were divorced!"

"Oh, Barbara"—he touched again, so anxiously, her deep, impassive wound—"it wasn't I—oh, never I!—who forgot. It was just that other fellow—that fellow on the road to Mandalay!"

She lifted her sombre eyes, flashing for a moment with the old, unchastened Barbara who had never been called upon to lend her husband to the world. Then, as their looks rested steadily, each on each, there came to her, like the voice of that revealing day, the deep, deep conviction that there were a great many things which didn't matter—especially when there were so many that did. "Tony," she said, "I saw the scene. I guess I—know about it." He gave an exultant, wondering little laugh. And she dropped beside him and hid her face upon his breast.

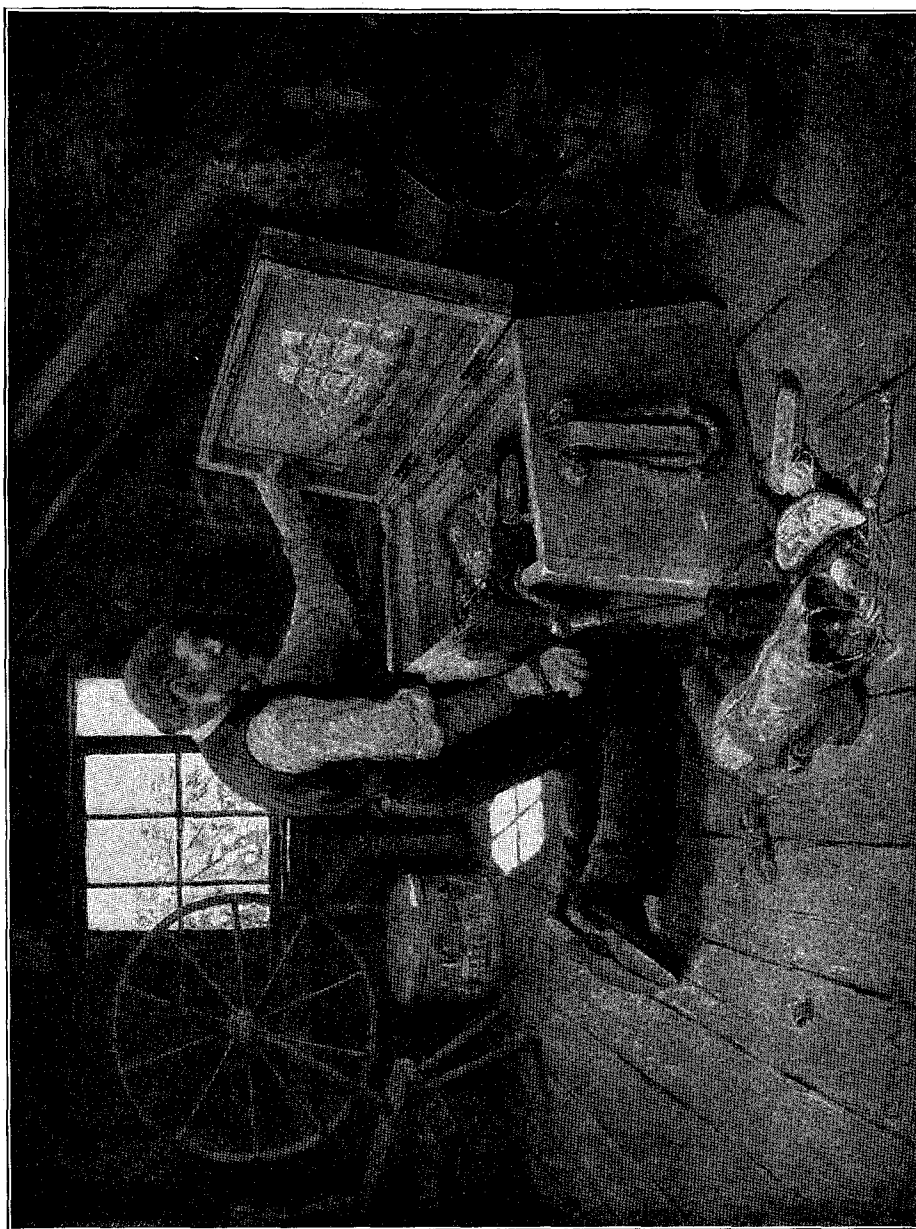
For what did she intend to do with an actor if she didn't mean to lend him to the world? Could he ever have given that

world its beautiful, desired Thanksgiving if he had kept back a little piece of himself to worry about his own? If, in his turn, he hadn't been willing to lend, for a while, his life to—no, not to the world, but to—that other fellow? Wasn't that what he was—for? It had not been done for nothing. It was true that he was "all in." And since there was a cost to be reckoned with, did she wish not to pay any share in the reckoning?

He felt her native seriousness stirring in his arms, and she lifted herself a little from him, before she said, "Tony, I was wrong. I'm glad it was me that was wrong. It makes me feel like praying to think of going out with you into Broadway, and the dusk, and the cold, and the lights—after—everything!—and being alone with you, in the crowd!—when I might have gone alone, by myself! To think of our having our dinner together, at a little table with shaded candles, in a corner!—when I meant it to be—all off—at dinner-time! Tony, I do thank God I saw the scene, even if you didn't get me a seat! I was just carried away by it at first. But I know, all the same—oh, I'm enough of an actress for that!—what a *pull* it must have been beforehand. And what's the use of trying to pull another way? I thank goodness I married an actor that can *act*!—even if he can't remember to be miserable!"

The relief and the tenderness of his heart wrung it with a sweetness that was like pain. He held her off by the shoulders, scanning her face with a touch of that laughter which was, after all, the very beating of his blood. "You don't happen to know," he asked her, "of anything for which I could suitably give thanks? You don't think that perhaps it's just as well for me that I married somebody who wasn't—an outsider? . . . And now, really, dinner!" he insisted.





Drawn by Clifford W. Ashley.

The Old Clipper.