

# IN HIS PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY

By Margret Temple

THE gray light of a waning day lay over the doctor's office. It darkened the heavy hangings of the room and intensified the sombreness of the book-lined walls; it seemed even to trace older lines in the doctor's face as he sat in his revolving chair, his eyes turned with professional gravity to his visitor.

The little clock on the mantel shelf ticked away the precious moments that were like so much gold to the great man, but he sat calmly attentive until the silence was broken, his keen eyes studying the nervous face of the man before him.

It was not a particularly interesting face; one could see a hundred or more, perhaps, of the same type in any American city. A clean-cut, rather thin contour, narrow cheeks and nervous lips, closed in a determined line. The brown hair was beginning to thin perceptibly, and the man's age was somewhere between forty and fifty—nearer fifty, if appearances could be trusted.

He raised his eyes from the floor at last and looked straight into the doctor's face.

"It is about Mrs. Tremaine that I wish to consult you," he said, blurting out the simple sentence spasmodically.

"So I presumed," returned the physician, his words, short and almost curt, softened by a voice singularly clear and an intonation that seemed to caress each syllable as it fell from his lips.

In the days when he had been a young and struggling surgeon, almost unknown in the great city, the rare beauty of his voice had inspired confidence and prepossessed patients in his favor, almost before his keen

brain and sure hand had demonstrated his unusual ability.

"I suppose Mrs. Tremaine has talked over the case with you?" he continued, interrogatively, with a quiet air of interest.

The man fidgeted in his chair, got up, walked across the room and then returned to the desk.

"The fact is, my wife does not know I am in New York," he answered, shortly.

If the doctor felt any surprise at this statement he failed to show it. He took up a paper-cutter and balanced it between his fingers.

"I suppose you have a reason for your action?"

"A reason—yes." Tremaine settled heavily in his chair and looked thoughtfully at his boots. Their shining surface failed to inspire him with words. "You don't allow smoking in here, do you?" he inquired, tentatively.

The doctor shook his head and smiled.

"I wish I could; I should like it above all things. I am a bit of a crank that way myself, but it's not possible."

The Havana Tremaine had been fingering slipped back into his pocket.

"All right," he said, good-naturedly; "it's a bad habit at best. My wife—" He interrupted himself with an abruptness almost startling, and wheeling round in his chair faced the doctor again squarely. "There is no human being I can speak of this to," he muttered, unsteadily, "unless, perhaps, it is to you."

The doctor made a short, rather impatient motion.

"All confidences are sacred to a

physician, of course, Mr. Tremaine, but—" and his voice repelled.

"Don't stop me with 'buts!'" exclaimed the man, quickly. "I tell you, doctor, I've walked the floor at home until my brain has whirled, and the Lord knows it's generally steady enough." He clutched the arm of his chair and searched the calm face before him appealingly. "It's about my wife," he ended, abruptly, "and whatever comes, I have got to get at the root of the matter."

The physician rose, and going to the window raised the shade. "Let me understand you," he said, his face turned to the cold Winter light.

"That is it," the other returned, almost pathetically. "I want you to understand—and help me—I mean," correcting himself quickly, "I want you to help me if—if it is possible. I used to think I could square my shoulders against most of the blows dealt me by the world. I am strong and my life has been an uphill road at best—" He glanced at the doctor's tall, slightly bent figure. "I don't suppose it is an easy road for any of us," he added, deprecatingly, "and sometimes the blows are leveled at a weak spot, at a muscle that's out of training."

The doctor turned, and seating himself again at the desk, leaned his head on his hand.

"Are you alluding to—your—to Mrs. Tremaine's health?" he said, slowly.

"To that—yes—and to worse things. Doctor, I tell you it's as if the ground had been suddenly cut from under my feet. I have no poise—no equilibrium. Turn which way I will, everything is black!"

He put his hands before his eyes and repeated the last word twice in a dull, meaningless tone.

"You know, of course," said the doctor, calmly, "that Mrs. Tremaine's operation was entirely successful."

"Yes, I suppose it was successful, from a medical standpoint," the man retorted, excitedly. "You have done your work well, doctor. I—" he

held out his hand—"don't think I am not grateful for it, but that operation may cost me—oh, well, it's something worse than any physical ailment; it's something that takes the life out of me—that strikes at the very root of my home." He paused a moment and then continued, in a calmer tone: "I suppose you are used to having all sorts of confidences made to you, but I—well, I have never been the sort of man to talk much, and it's difficult——"

The doctor lifted his head.

"Perhaps, after all, Mr. Tremaine, you are paining yourself uselessly. I may be unable to assist you in this matter."

"Don't say that, doctor! If you can't, no one can." A decided Southern accent emphasized the pathos of his halting words.

"Have you time for me to tell you a little about Mrs. Tremaine's life and my own?" he added, in rather an embarrassed tone.

The physician bowed his head.

"You know, of course, that Mrs. Tremaine is a Southerner like myself. In fact, we are distantly related. Her family's plantation in Louisiana joined ours, but they lost everything in the war, and gradually died out, until, when Mrs. Tremaine was a girl of sixteen, she and her mother lived alone in the old house, and there was scarcely a stick or stone on the place——"

The doctor looked up, interested.

"Then you married Mrs. Tremaine when she was barely sixteen?" he asked, quickly.

"Yes," retorted the other, looking surprised. "I was coming to that. Her mother died suddenly in the yellow fever epidemic. Well, I had cared for the girl almost from the days when she wore sunbonnets and short petticoats. We were always together; and the difference in our ages did not seem so pronounced then, so, naturally, in the horror of that time she turned to me—and we were married. She was scarcely more than a child."

He moved restlessly and looked

out of the window, a bitter pain harassing his eyes.

"I have begun to wonder lately," he continued, with slow emphasis, "whether poverty and lowliness would not have been better than what has come; but she was so young to struggle with life—and I loved her, and thought I could make her happy; and as God hears me," he affirmed, in a low, concentrated voice, "I think she has been happy these past years—until——"

The physician moved his head, and some of the papers fell from the desk to the floor. "Until?" he asked, questioning.

Tremaine got up and walked the length of the room, then came back and leaned his hand heavily on the desk.

"Doctor," he said, "I love my wife very dearly. She is all I have in the world, but—I can't pretend that she has cared for me in the same way—not," interrupting himself quickly, "that it is her fault. All that a woman could do she has done—but try as I will there are heights in her nature that even my love cannot help me to reach. I can no more discover the mystery of a rose's perfume by picking the petals apart than I can force my nature to meet hers. She is beyond me—that is all—just beyond me!"

In the physician's keen eyes a glimmer of pity dawned for this man who longed so passionately to strike the chords that would waken the music in a woman's heart, but whose clumsy fingers blundering on the strings evoked only mournful discords. There are many such, and their lives are not wholly sad, for they do not know; but Ralph Tremaine had not been vouchsafed the blessed unconsciousness that brings peace; he knew, and knowing, tasted the very dregs of the cup of bitterness.

"Doctor," he resumed, after a pause, "I didn't realize so much of this until she came up to New York for this operation. It was my fault, for I would trust her to none but the

best, and so, though I could not stay with her all during her convalescence, I knew she was safe with my cousin, and I was satisfied." He passed his hand wearily over his forehead, as if to smooth away the lines. "I did not realize it all at first," he repeated, "though she wrote time and again, prolonging her stay. I wanted her to enjoy her health, and I did not notice the change in her letters—the subtle change that meant so much. I thought she was not so well; that things had gone wrong—anything but the truth. Then as the days crept by it was forced upon me, and I knew even—even before I read this. It is to her old colored mammy."

He took out of a pocket-book a letter and opened it slowly. The edges were beginning to tear where it had been folded, and it was written on delicately colored paper.

"Pardon me," said the physician, drawing back, "have we any right to discuss what does not belong——?"

Tremaine's head was bent over the paper, but he lifted it somewhat haughtily.

"I hardly think an explanation is needed in this case," he retorted, quickly, "but I will give it. By a curious chance, as it seems to me now, poor Mammy lost her eyesight shortly after my wife left for the North, and I hesitated to tell Alice, knowing that the old woman was almost a mother to her, and the only thing left belonging to her own family; so when the letters came Mammy brought them to me to read to her—and this one was put into my hands with the rest." He fingered the paper mechanically.

There was silence. The doctor's face was set in an immovable mask; it was impossible to tell how much or how little he sympathized with his visitor. Perhaps pain and sorrow had become too much a part of his life to move him deeply; at any rate, he said nothing, and at last the other spoke again.

"I have been beating about the bush, I suppose," he said, slowly, "but it is a bitter thing to tell, and faltering doesn't make it easier. It is

simply this: My wife has come to feel for some other man what she could never feel for me!"

The physician turned two keen eyes on the man's pale face.

"How do you know this?"

Tremaine tapped the letter with his fingers. "She has told it herself—" His voice broke. "Poor child, she did not realize how much of her heart she was laying bare. Doctor—" he leaned forward impressively—"women tell their physician what they tell no other human being—I want to know the truth, cost what it may." He looked for a moment into the doctor's face. "She is as pure as a snowdrop," he said, unsteadily. "I would as soon believe one of God's angels guilty of an impure thought as to doubt her, and it has come to this—I have never denied her anything that I could give her, and I am not going to deny her—her happiness."

"What do you mean?" asked the physician, startled.

"Just this: If I find what I suspect is true—that she cares for another man with all her heart, as she never cared for me—I will give her her freedom. Money can do a great deal, and with the help of the law can untie the bonds that the Church has tied."

The physician looked at the man in incredulous amazement.

"I can scarcely credit what you say," he burst out at last, moved from his professional gravity.

Tremaine looked into his face. "Is it so strange that I should love her better than myself? Is there a law in heaven or on earth that should bind a young and helpless girl for life to one whom, at best, she can give only gratitude? Divorce may be all wrong, and it may be all right; wrong or right, she sha'n't be broken down in the whirlpool of misery that yawns before so many of us. I promised to shield and care for her, and I am going to do it in the face of the world."

Curiously the doctor looked down at the convulsed, passionate face before him.

"Have you no bitterness," he said at last, slowly, "for the man who has robbed you of your wife's love?"

Tremaine looked up, and in his eyes blazed anger and pride, and at last resignation; then he smiled, though his lips were white.

"He must be a better fellow than I am, or she would never have loved him."

For a moment a look of indecision passed over the physician's face, then he turned away.

"I fail to see how I can assist you in this matter, Mr. Tremaine. It seems to me you know all that is to be known——"

"I do *not* know all that is to be known," interrupted the other, vehemently. "I only surmise, and—I can never learn the truth from my wife; she will spare me at whatever cost to herself—and we shall live on with this hideous thing between us. Doctor, I want you to find out the truth for me. I must have it—I *will* have it!"

"The truth?" repeated the other, coldly. "Suppose you were not prepared to hear it?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean simply this—I might tell you something you would not care to hear."

"Do you think——?"

"I do not think; I simply suggest. Would you be prepared to hear the worst?" His musical voice had grown husky.

"You are speaking of an impossibility!"

The doctor raised his head and looked into the man's eyes. "Do not misunderstand me—I mean simply this: Would you be prepared to hear that your suspicions were correct? If the man your wife loved stood before you, could you honestly say what you have said to me? Would you have the courage? Remember, we are all human. Would you have the courage, I say, to give up everything the years would hold for you, to insure her happiness?"

Tremaine gripped the arms of his chair.

"You—speak as if you knew—as if——"

"I asked you a straightforward question. Can you answer it?"

"Are you doubting my word?"

"I am doubting nothing, but judging from my study of human nature, I realize that we are seldom ready or able to act up to our random statements, if put to the test."

Tremaine leaned forward and looked straight into the doctor's face.

"As God hears me," he answered, determinedly, "I put her happiness above everything else in the world. If you have anything to tell, tell it now. I came here to ask your assistance. Do you think," he added, coldly, "it was an idle motive that prompted me to bring my domestic troubles to an utter stranger?"

The physician walked hastily across the room, and pulling aside the curtains looked out into the Winter world. The snow was falling softly and steadily, and the window-pane was covered with a slight frost. The man's forehead touched the cold glass. Suddenly he came and stood before Tremaine. His delicate features were drawn, and the lines on his forehead seemed the salient characteristic of his face.

"Some odd freak of destiny led you to come to me, Mr. Tremaine," he said at last, his voice very low but every word clearly cut. "You have asked my aid in a situation for which, as I see it, there is no aid possible. Of all men in the world you should never have come to me. For I—I—" his voice faltered; then he went on in a still lower tone—"I think—I am—I believe Mrs. Tremaine cares for me."

"Good God!"

"You wanted the truth, and I may be a cad to tell it, but like you, I am putting her happiness first."

"Is this a test?"

"A test!" cried the other, vehemently, "of what? of your words? Why, man, would I have the time or the inclination to employ such a one?"

Tremaine stared into the doctor's face. He breathed heavily, and the

cords began to start out in his forehead. They measured each other with their eyes for a half-second, and one man turned away.

"And so it has come!" said Tremaine at length, in a choked voice. In spite of his efforts the muscles of his face twitched convulsively. "I was prepared; but—turn round, man, and let me look at you."

The last words rang tragically through the room.

And the doctor turned and faced him. "God knows why she cares!" he muttered, almost humbly, as the husband's miserable, doubting eyes searched his face and noted every detail, from the streaks of gray in the brown hair to the lines of thought and study over the wonderfully searching eyes, touched, at last, with the warmth of feeling.

"So she loves you?" Tremaine questioned, his voice coming slowly and with difficulty.

The doctor was silent.

"She loves you—and—do you—love—her?"

"Love her! Yes," flashed back the other, in a sudden, passionate outbreak, "but she has never—believe me—she has never——"

A raised hand silenced him.

"Do not attempt to defend my wife to me," said Tremaine, coldly. "There does not live on earth a man vile enough to doubt her——"

He broke off, and rising abruptly paced up and down the room. The physician's eyes followed him compassionately.

"What led you to consult—?" he began, but the words were cut off, as if a knife had severed them. A woman's light voice was speaking outside.

Both men stopped and their eyes met.

"Are there many people waiting?" asked the voice.

"Six or eight, but the doctor said if you would go in by the side door——"

"Hush—it is your wife!" He started forward, but Tremaine put out a detaining hand.



"No," he said, quickly, "let her come in."

"But——"

"I wish it."

The door leading to the hall was pushed softly open. There was a breath of cold air, a rustle of silk, a faint odor of violet, and a very charming vision framed itself in the doorway. There was silence for a minute, and then her startled eyes fixed themselves on her husband.

"Ralph!" she said, in a whisper of surprise, and her small, jeweled purse slipped to the floor.

Both men stooped to recover it, but her husband placed it in her hand.

"I came this morning," he said, smiling and pressing the fingers he held. "It was a surprise."

Her eyes traveled to the physician's set face, and she grew a little pale.

"What is it?" she asked.

Her husband's eyes were fixed on hers and his mouth was set in a determined line.

The doctor moved forward.

"Not now!" he said, in a startled tone. "Not now!"

"Yes, now!" returned Tremaine, commandingly, and he did not move his steady gaze from his wife's face.

"Alice," he said, deliberately, "I have found out something that you would never have told me—something that concerns us both very nearly, for it means your happiness."

The small, gloved hands were trembling in his, but he went on, relentlessly: "Forgive me for subjecting you to this scene, but we must look these things in the face. I think—rather, I have known for a long time—that you could not care for me in the way I do for you—no, do not speak—I understand. Do not think for a moment that I am blaming you. You gave me all that you could give, and for a time I was satisfied. But lately a new thing has come between us, a thing so strong that I don't want your small hands to grapple with it, and I am going to help you——"

"Ralph!"

"Listen, little one. I want to be your friend as well as your husband——"

The color had entirely faded from the woman's flower-like face, and she put up her hands with a pathetic motion to the furs at her throat. Her husband bent forward and deftly undid the clasp.

"I don't want this to last long, Alice, for the sake of us all. Don't think I am hard if I speak plainly. I know the secret that you have tried to hide from me, and I feel nothing but pity for you. God knows we can't control our love. If we could——"

He put his hand, with a rough gesture, to his eyes, and then, as she did not answer, went on:

"I have forced Doctor De Voe to tell me the truth," he said. "He loves you—and you—love——"

The woman started forward with a little cry.

"Don't say it—don't! It is not true!" she burst out, in a strangling voice.

"Alice!"

Two voices spoke the name.

In the physician's dark eyes there blazed an agonized question. The woman did not glance at him. She ran to her husband and thrust her two small cold hands into his.

"I have never belonged to anyone but you—I never will belong to anyone but you. How could you think—how could you dream of such an awful, hateful, deathly thing?"

The words were coming in little gasps, and she clung to him with a spasmodic strength that shook her whole body.

The man's face had gone white, but he held her hands tightly.

"Don't."

"But I *must*! Oh, Ralph, you will believe me, won't you? I may have flirted a little—just a little—you will not lay it up against me, will you? I did not mean anything." She gave a little gasp and then added, "I was only playing——"

Her husband looked at the other man's ghastly face and read the truth

of her words there. He put her hands on either side of his face.

"I was going to give you your freedom, Alice," he whispered, huskily. "I wanted you to be happy, but—" on his lifted face was a glorification of happiness—"I did not realize how hard it was until——"

He coughed two or three times and turned to where his hat and cane lay.

The woman's eyes sought the physician's and rested there; her face grew still whiter, but she said nothing, and her husband came and put her furs on her shoulders. Then he moved toward the doctor, the corners of his mouth twitching in an embarrassed way. But something in the other's face stopped him, and he turned to open the door for his wife, but she had silently left the room. He went back and held out his hand.

"I would have given her to you had things gone differently," he said, compassion softening his voice. "Don't think too hardly of her." And with another grip of the hand he was gone.

The great man stood in the centre of the room, where the light fell full on his face. A tragedy was written there.

He went slowly to his desk, and sitting down, dropped his head in his hands and gazed stolidly at the gray wall before him. The minutes came and went, and still he sat there, rigid, fighting his battle.

Outside his assistant waited for the bell warning him that the doctor would receive another patient; but it did not ring, and the minutes grew into hours, and darkness fell.

Then, in that bitter stillness, the door leading to the hall opened softly and a woman's figure was outlined for the second time in the dark framework. Her eyes struggled through the gloom and rested on the figure at the desk, bowed and silent.

With a rush she was at his side, and a little fluttering cry escaped her lips as she took his head in her arms and pressed it with a very passion of tenderness against her breast.

"Forgive me! Oh, forgive me!"

she sobbed. "It nearly killed me, but I owed my life to him. Everything I am he has made me. You understand—you *must* understand!" Then, as he did not answer, she went on, her words stumbling over one another in a tension of agony. "I soiled my lips with a lie, and I let you stand by and hear it!" She slipped to the floor and laid her bowed head on his knee. "I thought it would kill me; but it didn't—it didn't. Oh, my dear one, if you had only let me die under your knife!"

"Don't!"

"I must—oh, let me talk; it is for the last time; do you realize that? You could not stop me—if you did . . . ! Let me tell you what you have been to me, how every thought of my heart turns to you always, in the day or night. It may be wicked, but let me say it just this once!" She groped for his hand and held it against her wet cheek.

"At first," she went on, softly, "I only admired and revered and looked up to you. You were so great, and I loved your greatness. I was proud that you would let me sit here and talk while you kept all those other people waiting. It was foolish, but I could not help it."

His hand caressed her cheek compassionately, but he said nothing.

"I used to want to ask you about every tiny incident in my life, for you treated all my little troubles so seriously and so kindly. It was as if I had found something I had been looking for all my life. No wonder I loved you; you were so good, so good, so good!"

"My little one——"

"Don't call me that—I mustn't listen! And yet—say it once again—just once!"

"My child! my child!"

She broke down and sobbed bitterly.

"Will you forgive me—*can* you? You could not have loved me if I had forgotten my duty to him!"

The man stooped down and with a passion of pity and reverence wrapped his arms around the slight figure and

held it to his breast, tightly and in silence, until the little catching sobs in her voice were smothered.

There was a chime of bells as the clock struck the hour. Slowly she withdrew her arms and slipped away. Some withered violets were on the table in a silver bowl. She unpinned a great bunch from her breast, and groping her way to the inner room, where there was running water, filled the vase and carried it back

to the desk. Softly she loosened the purple cord around the fresh violets and dropped them into the water.

"It is my good-bye," she whispered. "Don't let any other woman give them to you—ever! Don't forget me—whatever comes in after years, don't forget me."

And in a stillness as absolute as if death were present the door opened and closed, and he was alone.



## THE BOOK OF LOVE

I DREAMED I saw an angel in the night,  
And she held forth Love's book, limned o'er with gold,  
That I might read of days of chivalry,  
And how men's hearts were wont to thrill of old.

Half-wondering, I turned the musty leaves,  
For Love's book counts out centuries as years,  
And here and there a page shone out undimmed,  
And here and there the text was blurred with tears.

I read of Grief, Doubt, Silence unexplained,  
Of many-featured Wrong, Distrust and Blame,  
Renunciation, bitterest of all—  
And yet I wandered not beyond Love's name.

At last I cried to her who held the book—  
So fair and calm she stood, I see her yet:  
"Why write these things within this book of Love?  
Why may we not pass onward and forget?"

Her voice was tender when she answered me:  
"Half-child, half-woman, earthly as thou art,  
How shouldst thou dream that Love is never Love  
Unless these things beat vainly on the heart?"

KATHERINE LA FARGE NORTON.



## AN AUTHORITY

JOHNNIE—Say, pop.

POP—Well, my son?

JOHNNIE—What is a revenue cutter?

POP—A revenue cutter, my son, is a—well, ask your Uncle Fred. He has to pay alimony.