

His Fortunate Grace

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.
CHAPTER II.
CHAPTER III.
CHAPTER IV.
CHAPTER V.
CHAPTER VI.
CHAPTER VII.
CHAPTER VIII.
CHAPTER IX.
CHAPTER X.
CHAPTER XI.
CHAPTER XII.
CHAPTER XIII.
CHAPTER XIV.
CHAPTER XV.
CHAPTER XVI.
CHAPTER XVII.
CHAPTER XVIII.
CHAPTER XIX.
CHAPTER XX.
CHAPTER XXI.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHAPTER XXIV.

TO
ALEECE VAN BERGEN.

HIS FORTUNATE GRACE.

CHAPTER I.

“ARE you quite sure?” Mr. Forbes laid down his newspaper, and looked with slightly extended mouth at his daughter who leaned forward in an attitude of suppressed energy, her hands clasped on the edge of the breakfast-table. The heiress of many millions was not handsome: her features were large and her complexion dull; but she had the carriage and ‘air’ of the New York girl of fashion, and wore a French morning-toilette which would have ameliorated a Gorgon.

“Quite sure, papa.”

“I suppose you have studied the question exhaustively.”

“Oh, yes, indeed. I have read Karl Marx and Henry George and a lot of others. I suppose you have not forgotten that I belong to a club of girls who aspire to be something more than fashionable butterflies, and that we read together?”

“And you are also positive that you wish me to divide my fortune with my fellow-men, and deprive you of the pleasant position of heiress?”

“Perfectly positive,” firmly. “It is terrible, terrible to think of the starving thousands. I feel it my duty to tell you, papa, that if you do not do this yourself, I shall—when—when—but I cannot even think of that.”

“No; don’t worry about it. I’m good for twenty or thirty years yet——”

“You are the handsomest and most distinguished-looking man in New York.”

“Thanks. To proceed: I should say that you are likely to be several things meanwhile. I don’t know that I shall even take the trouble to alter my will. Still, I may—that is unless you convert me. And you are also convinced that women should have the vote?”

“Yes! Yes! indeed I am. I know all the arguments for and against. I’ve heard and read everything. You see, if we get the vote we can bring Socialism about quite easily.”

“Without the slightest difficulty, I should say, considering the homogeneity of the feminine mind.”

“You darling sarcastic thing. But can’t you see what weight such women as we are interesting in the cause *must* have? We have carefully excluded the *nouveau riche*; only the very oldest and most notable names will be on our petition when we get it up.”

“Oh, you are going to get up a petition? Well, let that pass for the present. Suppose you fall in love and want to marry?”

“I shall tell him everything. What I intend to make of my life—do with what wealth I have at my disposal. If he does not sympathize with me and agree to my plans, he must go. A woman’s chief end is not matrimony.”

“I need not ask if you have ever been in love?”

“Oh, of course, I want to be, dreadfully. All women do—even we advanced women—now, papa! I don’t love you quite so well when you smile like that. I am twenty-one, and that is quite old for a girl who has been highly educated, has travelled, and been out two

years. I have a right to call myself advanced, because I have gone deliberately into the race, and have read up a great deal, even if I have as yet accomplished nothing. Exactly how much are you worth, papa?"

"Broadly speaking, about thirty millions. As a great deal of that is in railroad and other stock, I am liable to be worth much less any day; much is also in land, which is worth only what it will bring. Still, I should say that I am reasonably sure of a fair amount."

"It is terrible, papa! All that land! Do give some of it at least to the poor dear people—I assure you we feel that we have taken them under our wing, and have grown quite sentimental over them. Mr. George would tell you what to do, at once. That man's very baggy knees fascinate me: he is so magnificently in earnest. When he scolded us all for being rich, the other day at the meeting, I loved him."

"It is a great relief to me that George is a married man. Well, my dear, your allowance is ten thousand dollars a year. Do what you please with it, and come to me if your fads and whims demand more. God forbid that I should stand in the way of any woman's happiness. By the by, what does your mother think of this business?"

"She is *most* unsympathetic."

"So I should imagine," said Mr. Forbes, drily. "Your mother is the cleverest woman I know."

CHAPTER II.

AFTER luncheon, Miss Forbes hied herself to a drawing-room meeting in behalf of Socialism. Despite the fact that she had elected the rôle of mental muscularity, she gave studious application to her attire: her position and all that pertained to it were her enduring religion; the interests of the flashing seasons were unconsciously patronised rather than assimilated. As she walked up the Avenue toward the house of her friend, Mrs. Latimer Burr, she looked like a well-grown lad masquerading in a very smart outfit of brown tweed, so erect and soldierly was her carriage, so independent her little stride. A bunch of violets was pinned to her muff, another at her throat, and she wore a severe little toque instead of the picture-hat she usually affected.

She smiled as she swung along, and one or two women looked back at her and sighed. She was quite happy. She had never known an ungratified wish; she was spoken of in the newspapers as one of the few intellectual young women in New York society; and now she had a really serious object in life. She felt little spasms of gratification that she had been born to set the world to rights—she and a few others: she felt that she was not selfish, for she grudged no one a share in the honours.

When she reached Mrs. Burr's house, high on the Avenue, and overlooking the naked trees and the glittering white of the Park, she found that other toilettes had taken less time than hers: several of her friends complimented the occasion with a punctuality which she commended without envy.

The large drawing-room, which was to be the scene of operations, was a marvellous combination of every pale colour known to nature and art, and looked expectant of white-wigged dames, sparkling with satin and diamonds, tripping the mazes of the minuet with gentlemen as courtly as their dress was rich and colourous. But only a half-dozen extremely smart young women of the hoary Nineteenth Century sat in a group, talking as fast as seals on a rock; and the slim little hostess was compactly gowned in pearl-grey cloth, her sleek head dressed in the fashion of the moment.

She came forward, a lorgnette held close to her eyes. “How dear of you, Augusta, to be so prompt!” she said, kissing her lightly. “Dear me! I wish I could be as frightfully in earnest as the rest of you, but for the life of me I can’t help feeling that it’s all a jolly good lark—perhaps that’s the effect of my ex-sister-in-law, Patience Sparhawk, who says we are only playing at being alive. But we can’t all have seventeen different experiences before we are twenty-four, including a sojourn in Murders’ Row, and a frantic love affair with one’s own husband——”

“Tell me, Hal, what is a woman like who has been through all that?” interrupted Augusta, her ears pricking with girlish curiosity. “Is she eccentric? Does she look old—or something?”

“She’s not much like us,” said Mrs. Burr, briefly. “You’ll meet her in time; it’s odd you never happened to, even if you weren’t out. Of course she can’t go out for awhile yet; it would hardly be good taste, even if she wanted to.”

“How interestingly dreadful to have had such a thing in the family. But I should think she would be just the one to take life seriously.”

“Oh, she does; that’s the reason she doesn’t waste any time. Here is someone else. Who is it?—oh, Mary Gallatin.”

Augusta joined the group.

“Where is Mabel Creighton?” demanded one of the girls. “I thought she was coming with you.”

“Haven’t you heard?” Miss Forbes, with an air of elaborate indifference, drew her eyelids together as if to focus a half-dozen women that were entering. “The Duke of Bosworth arrives to-day, and she has stayed at home to receive him.”

“Augusta! What do you mean? *What* Duke of Bosworth?”

“There is only one duke of the same name at a time, my dear. This is the Duke of Bosworth of Aire Castle—and I suppose a half-dozen others—of the West Riding, of the district of Craven, of the County of Yorkshire, England. He has five other titles, I believe; and enjoys the honour of the friendship of Fletcher Cuyler.”

“Well!”

“Mabel met him abroad, and got to know him quite well; and when he wrote her that he should arrive to-day, she thought it only hospitable to stay at home and receive him.”

“Are they engaged? Augusta, *do* be an angel.”

“I am sure I have not the slightest idea whether they are engaged or not. Mabel always has a flirtation on with somebody.”

“What is he like? How perfectly funny! How quiet she has kept him. Is he good-looking—or—well, just like some of the others?”

“Mabel has merely mentioned him to me, and I have not seen his photograph.”

“She’d make a lovely bride; and Mrs. Creighton has such exquisite taste—St. Thomas’ would be a dream, I suppose he’ll wear a grey suit with the trousers turned up and a pink shirt. I do hope he won’t walk up the Avenue with her with a big black cigar in his mouth.”

“Is that what we came here to talk about?” asked Miss Forbes, severely. “What difference does it make what a foreign titled thing looks like? We are here to discuss a question which will one day exterminate the entire order.”

“True,” exclaimed a dark-haired distinguished-looking girl who was mainly responsible for the intellectual reputation of her set, albeit not exempt from the witchery of fads. “We must stop gossiping and attend to business. Do you know that I am expected to speak? How am I to collect my thoughts?”

“You have so many, Alex,” said Miss Forbes, admiringly, “that it wouldn’t matter if a few got loose. Have you prepared your speech? I have mine by heart.”

“I have thought it out. I don’t think I shall be frightened; it is really such a very serious matter.”

“Have you spoken to your father?”

“Oh, we’ve talked it over, but I can’t say that he agrees with us.”

Augusta laughed consciously. “There are probably some points of similarity in our experiences. But we must be firm.”

Some thirty women, gowned with fashionable simplicity, had arrived, and were seated in a large double semi-circle. They looked

alert and serious. Mrs. Burr drifted aimlessly about for a moment, then paused before a table and tapped it smartly with her lorgnette.

“I suppose we may as well begin,” she said. “I believe we are going to discuss to-day the—a—the advisability of women having the vote—franchise. Also Socialism. Miss Maitland, who has thoroughly digested both subjects, and many more, has kindly consented to speak; and Dr. Broadhead is coming in later to give us one of his good scoldings. Alexandra, will you open the ball?”

“Hal, you are incorrigible,” exclaimed Miss Maitland, drawing her dark brows together. “At least you might pretend to be in earnest. We think it very good of you to lend us your house, and we are delighted that you managed Dr. Broadhead so cleverly, but we don’t wish to be flouted, for we, at least, are in earnest.”

“Alexis, if you scold me, I shall cry. And I’ll now be serious—I swear it. You know I admire you to death. Your French poetry is adorable; you have more ideas for decorating than any professional in New York, and you fence like a real Amazon. I am simply dying to hear you make a speech; but first let me see if Latimer is hiding anywhere.”

She went out into the hall and returned in a moment. “It would be just like Latimer to get Fletcher Cuyler and listen, and then guy us. Now, Alexandra, proceed,” and she seated herself, and applied her lorgnette to her bright quizzical eyes.

Miss Maitland, somewhat embarrassed by her introduction, stepped to the middle of the room and faced her audience. She gave a quick sidelong glance at her skirts. They stood out like a yacht under full sail. She was a fine looking girl, far above woman’s height, with dignified features, a bright happy expression,

and a soft colour. She was a trifle nervous, and opened her jacket to gain time, throwing it back.

“That’s a Paquin blouse,” whispered a girl confidently to Augusta.

“Sh-h!” said Miss Forbes severely.

Miss Maitland showed no further symptom of nervousness. She clasped her hands lightly and did not make a gesture nor shift her position during her speech. Her repose was very impressive.

“I think we should vote,” she said decidedly. “It will not be agreeable in many respects, and will heavily increase our responsibilities, but the reasons for far outweigh those against. A good many of us have money in our own names. We all have large allowances. Some day we may have the terrible responsibility of great wealth. The income-tax is in danger of being defeated. If we get the vote, we may do much toward making it a law, and it is a move in the right direction towards Socialism. Our next must be towards persuading the Government to take the railroads. It is shocking that the actual costs of transit should be so small, the charges so exorbitant and the profits so enormous. I feel this so oppressively that every time I make a long journey by rail, I give the equivalent of my fare to the poor at once. It is a horrifying thing that we on this narrow island of New York city should live like hothouse plants in the midst of a malarious swamp: that almost at our back doors the poor are living, whole families in one room, and on one meal a day. My father gives me many thousands a year for charity, but charity is not the solution of the problem. There must be a redistribution of wealth. Of course I have no desire to come down to poverty; I am physically unfit for it, as are all of us. We should have sufficient left to insure our comfort; but any

woman with brain can get along without the more extravagant luxuries. It is time that we did something to justify our existence, and if the law required that we worked two or three hours a day instead of leading the idle life of pleasure that we do——”

“We are ornamental; that is something,” exclaimed a remarkably pretty woman. “I am sure the people outside love to read about and look at us. Society gossip is not written for *us*.”

Miss Maitland smiled. “You certainly are ornamental, Mary,” she said; “but fancy how much more interesting you would be if you were useful as well.”

“I’d lose my good looks.”

“Well, you can’t keep them forever. You should cultivate a substitute meanwhile, and then you never need be driven back into the ranks of *passée*, disappointed women. Faded beauties are a bore to everybody.”

“I refuse to contemplate such a prospect. Alex, you are getting to be a horrid rude advanced New Woman.”

Mrs. Burr clapped her hands. “How delightful!” she cried, “I didn’t know we were to have a debate.”

“Now keep quiet, all of you,” said Miss Maitland; “I have not finished. Mary Gallatin, don’t you interrupt me again. Now that we understand this question so thoroughly, we must have more recruits. Of course, hundreds of women of the upper class are signing the petition asking for the extension of the franchise to our sex, but few of them are interested in Socialism. And if it is to be brought about, it must be by us. I have little faith in the rag-tag bob-tail element at present enlisted in that cause. They not only

carry little weight with the more intelligent part of the community, but I have been assured that they would not fight—that they take it out in talk; that if ever there was a great upheaval, they would let the anarchists do the killing, and then step in, and try to get control later.

“Now, I thoroughly despise a coward; so do all women; and I have no faith in the propagandism of men that won’t fight. What we must do is to enlist our men. They are luxurious now, and love all that pertains to wealth; but, as Wellington said once of the same class in England: ‘The puppies can fight!’ Not that our men are puppies—don’t misunderstand me—but you know what I mean. They would only seem so to a man who had spent his life in the saddle.

“It has been said that the Civil War took our best blood, and that that is the reason we have no great men now; all the most gallant and high-minded and ambitious were killed—although I don’t forget that Mr. Forbes could be anything that he chose. I suppose he thinks that American statesmanship has fallen so low that he scorns to come out avowedly as the head of his party, and merely amuses himself pulling the wires. But I feel positive that if a tremendous crisis ever arose, it would be Mr. Forbes who would unravel the snarl. You can tell him that, Augusta, with my compliments.

“Now, I have come to the real point of what I have to say. It was first suggested to me by Helena Belmont when she was on here last, and it has taken a strong hold on my mind. We must awaken the soul in our men—that is what they lack. The germ is there, but it has not been developed; perhaps I should say that the soul of the American people rose to its full flower during the Civil War, and

then withered in the reaction, and in the commercial atmosphere which has since fitted our nation closer than its own skin. Miss Belmont says that nothing will arouse the men but another war; that they will be nothing but a well-fed body with a mental annex until they once more have a 'big atmosphere' to expand in. But I don't wholly agree with her, and the thought of another such sacrifice is appalling. I believe that the higher qualities in man can be roused more surely by woman than by bloodshed, and that if we, the women of New York, the supposed orchids, butterflies, or whatever people choose to call us, whose luxury is the cynosure and envy of the continent, could be instrumental in giving back to the nation its lost spiritual quality—understand, please, that I do not use the word in its religious sense—it would be a far greater achievement than any for which the so-called emancipated women are vociferating. The vote is a minor consideration. If we acquire the influence over men that we should, we shall not need it. And personally, I should dispense with it with great pleasure.”

“Bravo! young lady,” exclaimed a vibrating resonant voice, and a clerical man entered the room to the clapping of many hands. His eyes were keen and restless, his hair and beard black and silver, and there was a curious disconcerting bald spot on his chin. He looked ready to burst with energy.

“Thank you all very much, but don't clap any more, for I have only a few minutes to spare. How do you do, Mrs. Burr? Yes, that was a very good speech—I have been eavesdropping, you see. Feminine, but I am the last to quarrel with that. It is not necessary for a woman to be logical so long as her instincts are in the right direction. Well, I will say a few words to you; but they must be few as I am very hoarse: I have been speaking all day.” He strode about as he talked, and occasionally smote his hands together. He

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