HAROLD BINDLOSS

FOR THE ALLINSON HONOR


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CHAPTER I
THE TENANT AT THE FIRS

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It was a hot autumn afternoon. Mrs. Olcott, a young and attractive woman, reclined in a canvas chair beside a tea-table on the lawn in front of the cottage she had lately taken in the country. Her thin white dress displayed a slender and rather girlish form; her dark hair emphasized the delicate coloring of her face, which wore a nervous look. As a matter of fact, she felt disturbed. Clare Olcott needed somebody to take care of her; but she had few friends, and her husband held a government appointment in West Africa. His pay was moderate and he had no private means. His relatives justified their neglect of his wife by the reflection that he had married beneath him; and this was why he had commended her, with confidence, to the protection of a friend.

Andrew Allinson, who had made Olcott's acquaintance when serving as lieutenant of yeomanry during the Boer campaign, sat on a grassy bank near by with a teacup in his hand. He was strongly built and negligently dressed, in knickerbockers and shooting jacket. The bicycle he had just ridden leaned against the hedge. Andrew had lately reached his twenty-ninth year. He had large blue eyes that met you with a direct glance, a broad forehead, and a strong jaw. On the whole, he was a good-looking man, but his characteristic expression was one of rather heavy good-humor. Though by no means stupid, he had never done anything remarkable, and most of the Allinsons thought him slow.

Raising himself a little, he looked slowly round. Beyond the hedge the white highroad climbed a bold ridge of moor that blazed in the strong sunshine with regal purple; farther back, smooth-topped hills faded into an ethereal haziness through varying shades of gray. The head of the deep valley near the house was steeped in blue shadow, but lower down oatfields gleamed with ocher and cadmium among broad squares of green. There were flowers in the borders about the tiny lawn, and creepers draped the front of the house. The still air was filled with the drone of bees; all was eminently peaceful.

"How do you like the place?" he asked. "It's nicer than London in weather like this, and you're looking better than you did when I saw you there."

Mrs. Olcott gave him a grateful smile.

"I haven't regretted leaving town. I was miserable and scarcely saw anybody after Tom sailed. Our small flat was too far from the few people I knew; and even if it had been nearer, I couldn't entertain. I was feeling very downhearted the day you called."

Andrew remembered having found her looking very forlorn in a dingy and shabbily furnished room. She was sitting at a writing-table with a pile of bills before her, about which she had made a naive confession.

"I'm glad you find things pleasant here; I thought you would," he said.

"It's so fresh and green. In the morning and at sunset the moorland air's like wine. Then the house is very pretty and remarkably cheap."

She looked at him sharply, for he had found the house for her; but he answered with heavy calm.

"I don't think it's dear."

After that there was a few moments' silence, during which they heard the soft splash of a stream falling into the valley. Then he turned to her with a resolute air.

"And now, about those bills? You have put me off once or twice, but I want to see them."

Mrs. Olcott colored and hesitated, but she opened a drawer in the table and took out a bundle of papers, which she handed to him. To her surprise and consternation, he counted them before he put them into his pocket.

"These are not all. Give me the others."

"I can manage about the rest," she protested.

"Let me have them; you can't begin here in difficulties."

Mrs. Olcott rose and he watched her enter the house with quiet pity. She was not a capable woman, and he was thankful that she had not got into worse embarrassments. She came back, still somewhat flushed, and gave him a few more papers.

"I'm afraid I'm a wretchedly bad manager," she confessed. "As soon as my next remittance comes, I will send you a check."

"When it suits you," he said, and added thoughtfully: "One of us should tell your husband about this; perhaps it had better be you."

She smiled, for he was now and then boyishly ingenuous. He sat directly opposite the gate, where all passers-by could see him, and he had somehow an unfortunate air of being at home in the place.

"Yes," she said, "I will write by the first mail. I feel less embarrassed because Tom told me that if I was ever in any difficulty I might consult you. He described you as the right sort—and I have found it true."

"I suppose you know that I owe a good deal to your husband," Andrew answered awkwardly.

"He told me that you and he were in the field hospital together for a time, and before then he helped you in some way when you were wounded, but he never said much about it. What did he do? You may smoke while you tell me."

"I think you ought to know, because it will show the claim Tom has on me."

Andrew lighted a cigarette and began in a disjointed manner, for he was not a fluent speaker:

"It was a dazzlingly bright morning and getting very hot—our side had been badly cut up in the dark, and we were getting back, a mixed crowd of stragglers, a few miles behind the brigade. Tom and Sergeant Carnally, the Canadian, had no proper business with the wreck of my squadron, but there they were. Anyhow, only half of us were mounted, and when we found ourselves cut off we tried to hold a kopje—the horses back in a hollow, except mine, which was shot as I dismounted. I was fond of the poor faithful brute, and I suppose that made me savage, for I felt that I must get the fellow who killed it."

He paused and his face hardened.

"There we were, lying among the stones, with the sun blazing down on us; faint puffs of smoke on the opposite rise, spirts of sand jumping up where the Mauser bullets struck. Now and then a man dropped his rifle and the rest of

us set our teeth. It wasn't a spectacular fight, and we kept it up in a very informal way; two or three commissioned officers, dismounted troopers, and a few lost line Tommies, firing as they got a chance. The man I wanted had gone to earth beside a big flat stone, and I dropped the bullets close about it; a hundred yards I made it and the light good. I suppose I was so keen on my shooting that I didn't pay much attention when somebody said they were flanking us; and the next thing I knew a Boer had put a bullet in my leg. Anyhow, I couldn't get up, and when I looked round there was no one about. Then I must have shouted, for Tom came running back, with the sand spirting all round. Carnally was behind him. It looked like certain death, but Tom got hold of me, and dragged me a few yards before Carnally came up. Then we all dropped behind a big stone, and I'm not clear about the rest. Somebody had heard the firing and detached a squadron with a gun. But I can still picture Tom, running with his face set through the spirting sand—one doesn't forget things like that."

The blood crept into Clare Olcott's pale cheeks and her eyes shone. No one could have doubted that she admired and loved her absent husband.

"Were you not with Carnally when he broke out of the prison camp?" she asked presently.

"I was. Our guard was friendly and careless, and we picked up a hint of a movement we thought our army ought to know about. We were caged in behind a very awkward fence, but I'd found a wire-nipper in the sand—they were used to cut defense entanglements. Then we held a council and decided that somebody must break out with the news,

but while two men might do so, more would have no chance to dodge the guard. Carnally and I were picked, and after waiting for a dark night we cut the wire and crawled out, close behind a sentry we hadn't seen. Of course, knowing what we did about the Boers' intentions, we couldn't give up our plan."

Mrs. Olcott recognized that Andrew Allinson was not the man to abandon a duty, though he was unarmed and the sentry carried a magazine rifle.

"Well," he resumed, "I crept up and seized the fellow by the leg. He dropped his rifle, and Carnally slipped away. We'd arranged that if we got out one was not to stop for the other."

"But what happened to you? Did the Boer pick up his rifle?"

"No," said Andrew quietly; "I got it first."

"But——" said Mrs. Olcott, and stopped.

Andrew smiled.

"You see, he had called out when I grabbed him and several of his friends were running up. I didn't think he'd noticed Carnally, who had got clear off, and there was a chance of its being some time before they missed him. Then the fellow had shown us one or two small favors—given me some tobacco, among other things he might have got into trouble for."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Olcott expressively. "So you let them take you back to prison. But what about the Canadian?"

"He got through safely and they made a fuss over him. Offered him a commission, which he was too sensible to take."

"Tom came home promoted and got his West African appointment; Carnally could have had a commission; and you went back to prison. Though of course they deserved it, didn't it strike you that the rewards were not very fairly shared out?"

"I believe my people were disappointed when I returned as undistinguished as I went out, though I don't know that they were surprised. So far as I was concerned, it was an inglorious campaign—twice in a hospital, and some months in a prison camp. And yet, I'll admit that I left England determined on doing something brilliant."

Mrs. Olcott made no remark. He did not seem to attach much importance to the incident that had secured his comrade's escape. His conduct was not of the kind that catches the public eye, but her husband, whose opinion was worth having, believed in Allinson.

"Well," he resumed, "I've stayed some time. Are you sure you're quite comfortable here? There's nothing you feel short of?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I ought to be happy. It's perhaps a trifle quiet: nobody has called on me yet."

"I dare say that can be altered," he replied; and though she did not suppose her solitude was likely to be enlivened at his request, she gave him her hand gratefully and let him go.

Picking up his bicycle, he wheeled it up the road, which wound between yellow harvest fields and dark-green clover to the long ascent of the moor. Here the gray stone walls broke off and the open heath ran up, steeped in strong color: the glowing crimson of the ling checkered with the

purple of the heather, mossy patches showing lemon and brightest green, while the gaps from which peat was dug made blotches of rich chocolate-brown. Andrew noticed it all with quiet appreciation, though he was thinking hard as he slowly climbed the hill. He had made Mrs. Olcott a promise, and he meant to keep it, but the thing was beginning to look more difficult than he had imagined. His sisters might have helped him by recognizing the lonely woman, but they had shown some prejudice against her, and this was unfortunate, for their attitude would have its effect on their neighbors.

The Allinsons were people of importance in the countryside and the history of the family was not without romance. Long ago an Andrew Allinson had become possessed, by violence most probably, of a strong stone peel, half fortress, half farmstead, that commanded a fertile dale up which the Scots moss-troopers often rode to the foray. Little was known of his descendants, except that they held the peel for several generations and were buried with a coat of arms roughly cut upon their tombstones in a moorland kirkyard. Then had come a break, when they were perhaps driven out by economic changes, for the family vanished from the dale and next appeared as London goldsmiths in Queen Anne's reign. Later, Andrew's grandfather, retiring from his banking business, resumed the coat of arms, bought back the peel and built a commodious house about it. On his death it was discovered that his property had shrunk in value owing to changing times, and his shrewd north-country widow gave up the hall and coat of arms and made her son reopen the family

business. He had prospered and maintained the best traditions of the ancient firm, for Allinson & Son was noted for caution, decorum and strict probity. The firm was eminently sound and carried on its business in an old-fashioned, austere way.

To its head's keen disappointment, his only son, Andrew, showed no aptitude for commerce, and after two years in the counting-house was allowed to follow his own devices. Then on the marriage of Andrew's sister to a clever young business man, the latter was made a partner. Soon after this Andrew's father died, leaving him a large share of his money, which was, however, to remain in the business, over which his brother-in-law, Leonard Hathersage, now had control.

When the gradient grew easier Andrew mounted, but got down again with a frown a few minutes later. The Boer's nicked bullet had badly torn the muscles of his thigh, and now and then the old wound troubled him. Though he loved horses, he could no longer ride far with pleasure, and, being of active temperament, had taken to the bicycle.

He had not gone far before he saw a girl ride out from behind a grove of gnarled spruce firs and he joined her when she pulled up her horse to wait for him. Ethel Hillyard looked well in the saddle: tall and rather largely built, she was nevertheless graceful and generally characterized by an air of dignified repose. Now, however, there was amusement in the fine gray eyes she fixed on Andrew.

"You look moody, and that's not usual," she said.

They were old friends, and Andrew answered her confidentially.

"I've been thinking and, for another thing, I found I couldn't get up this bit of a hill. I suppose it oughtn't to worry me, but it does. You see, a lameness that comes on when I least expect it is all I brought back from South Africa."

Ethel gave him a sympathetic nod as she started her horse.

"It's a pity, but you might have suffered worse; and, after all, distinction is sometimes cheaply gained."

"You don't win it by keeping people busy curing you and seeing that you don't break out of prison camps," Andrew retorted grimly.

"But what else were you thinking of that disturbed you?"

"My thoughts were, so to speak, all of a piece—one led to another. I did nothing in South Africa, and it has struck me lately that I haven't done much anywhere else, except to catch salmon in Norway and shoot a few Canadian deer. Now there's Leonard, who's not an Allinson, making money for all of us and managing the firm."

"Leonard got money and the opportunity for making more from Allinson's."

"That's true, but it doesn't excuse me. I ought to be a power in the firm, and I don't suppose I could even keep one of its books properly."

He walked on in silence for the next minute or two and his companion watched him with interest. His brows were knit, his brown face looked strong as well as thoughtful, and Ethel did not agree with his relatives, who thought him a bit of a fool. She was inclined to believe that Leonard had spread that impression and the others had adopted it

without consideration. Andrew had been idle, but that was his worst fault, and he might change. There was, however, nothing significant in his taking her into his confidence; he had often done so, though she realized with half regretful acquiescence that it was only as a confidante that he thought of her. He could not have chosen a better one, for Ethel Hillyard was a girl of unusual character, and she now determined to exert her influence for his benefit.

"Isn't Allinson's rather branching out of late?" she asked.

"It is. The West African goldfield was a new kind of venture, though it's paying handsomely; and we're now taking up a mine in Canada. Of course, the old private banking business has gone under and one must move with the times; but, in a sense, it's a pity."

Ethel understood him. Her father had dealt with Allinson's and she knew the firm had hitherto been dignified and conservative, while Leonard was essentially modern in his methods and what is known as pushing. She foresaw disagreements if Andrew ever took an active part in the business, which he had a right to do.

"Perhaps it isn't necessary that you should be good at bookkeeping," she said. "Is there no place for you in these new foreign schemes? You have traveled in the Canadian bush to shoot deer, and you seemed to like it; wouldn't it be as interesting if you went there to look for minerals or manage a mine? You would have the free life in the wilds, but with an object."

"There's something in that," Andrew replied thoughtfully. "I happen to know the country where the mine is and it's

unusually rough. It's curious that you have made a hazy idea I've had a little clearer. I'll think over the thing."

Ethel knew that she had said enough. She would miss the man if he went away, but it would be better for him and she knew that she would never have more than his liking.

"Where is the mine?" she asked.

"It's among the rocks some distance back from the Lake of Shadows in western Ontario."

"The Lake of Shadows!" Ethel exclaimed. "A friend I made in London used to go there with her father for fishing and shooting; but that's not important."

"Well," said Andrew, "I've talked enough about myself. There's a favor I want to ask. Will you call on Mrs. Olcott?"

Ethel started. Mrs. Olcott was young and pretty; nobody knew anything about her husband; Andrew's visits had already excited comment.

"Why should I call?" she inquired.

He gave her the best reasons he could think of for befriending the lonely woman, and she pondered them for a moment or two. Then she asked bluntly:

"How was it that Mrs. Olcott chose this neighborhood, where she knows nobody?"

"I suggested it," said Andrew, simply. "The Firs was empty, and she has few friends anywhere."

Though she had attached no importance to the remarks that had been made about him, Ethel found his unembarrassed candor reassuring. He had, however, asked her to do something that was harder than he imagined, and she hesitated.

"Very well," she said; "I will call."

"Thanks. I knew I could count on you."

They had now reached the top of the hill, and Ethel took a crossroad while Andrew mounted his bicycle, but she turned her head, and watched him ride across the moor. Andrew, however, did not look back at her, and by and by she urged her horse to a trot.

CHAPTER II
THE FAMILY PRIDE

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The hall which Andrew's grandfather had built around the peel had for years been let with its shooting rights. Ghyllside, however, where Andrew lived, was a commodious house, and Leonard Hathersage was frequently glad to spend a week-end there. He and his wife had arrived on the previous evening, and he was now busy in the library while Andrew sat talking to his sisters on the terrace.

Though the light was fading, it was not yet dark, and the air was still and fragrant with flowers. Yew hedges and shrubberies were growing indistinct; a clump of firs in a neighboring meadow loomed up black and shadowy, but a band of pale saffron light still shone behind the hall on the edge of the moorland a mile away. The square peel stood out harsh and sharp against the glow, the rambling house with its tall chimneys trailing away into the gloom on its flanks.

Andrew, who had early lost his mother, had three sisters. Florence, Leonard's wife, his senior by several years, was a tall, prim and rather domineering woman; Gertrude, who had married Antony Wannop, a local gentleman, was gentler and less decided than her sister; Hilda, the youngest of all, was little, dark, and impulsive.

Wannop leaned on the terrace wall between the flower urns with a cigar in his mouth. He was stout and generally marked by a bluff geniality.

"Where did you go this afternoon, Andrew, when you wouldn't come with us to the Warringtons'?" Hilda asked.

Andrew would have preferred to evade the question, but that seemed impossible.

"I went to see Mrs. Olcott."

"Again!" exclaimed Hilda, who prided herself on being blunt.

Wannop chuckled softly, but Florence claimed Andrew's attention.

"Don't you think you have been there often enough?"

"It hasn't struck me in that light."

"Then," replied Florence, "I feel it's time it did."

"Come now!" Wannop broke in. "Three to one is hardly fair. Don't be bullied, Andrew; a bachelor can be independent."

"How do you make it three?" Hilda asked. "Only Florence and I mentioned the matter."

"I am, of course, acquainted with Gertrude's views," Wannop explained.

Hilda laughed. Antony, with his characteristic maladroitness, had somehow made things worse, and Andrew's face hardened. His sisters were generally candid with him, but they had gone too far. With a thoughtlessness he sometimes showed, he had told them nothing about his acquaintance with Clare Olcott's husband.

"You're not much of an ally," he said with a dry smile. "Anyway, as there's no reason why I shouldn't go to The Firs, I'm not likely to be deterred. I may as well mention that I met Ethel Hillyard and begged her to call."

"On Mrs. Olcott?" Florence cried. "What did she say?"

"She promised."

The astonishment of the others was obvious, but Hilda was the only one who ventured to express it.

"Andrew, you're a wonder! You haven't the least idea of scheming, and you'd spoil the best plot you took a hand in, and yet you have a funny, blundering way of getting hard things done."

"You have hinted that I was a bit of a fool," said Andrew; "but I don't see why this should be hard."

As an explanation was undesirable, Hilda let his remark pass and addressed the others.

"He has beaten us and we may as well give in gracefully. If Ethel goes, all the people who count will follow her."

"There's more in Andrew than his friends suspect," Wannop observed, laughing.

They let the subject drop, and Florence went in search of her husband.

"What's your opinion of Allinson's new policy, Andrew?" Wannop asked.

"I don't know what to think. One can be too conservative nowadays, but I'll confess that I liked the firm's old-fashioned staidness better. Even the old dingy offices somehow made you feel that the Allinsons were sober, responsible people. The new place with its brass-work, plate-glass and gilding was somewhat of a shock to me; but the business is flourishing. Mining speculation was quite out of my father's line, but Leonard makes it pay."

"I've a few thousands in the African concern," Wannop remarked with complacent satisfaction. "As it looks as if I'd

get my money back in about seven years, I wish I'd put in twice as much."

Hilda let her eyes rest on the fading outline of the grim old peel.

"Well," she said, "I don't agree with Leonard's methods. They're vulgarly assertive, and the new offices strike me as being out of place. Allinson's ought to be more dignified. Even when we stole cattle from the Scots in the old days we did so in a gentlemanly way."

"Is stealing ever gentlemanly?" Wannop inquired.

"It's sometimes less mean than it is at others. Though I've no doubt that we robbed the Armstrongs and the Elliots, I can't think that we plundered our neighbors or took a bribe to shut our eyes when the Scots moss-troopers were riding up the dale. The Allinsons couldn't have betrayed the English cause, as some of the Borderers did."

"No," said Wannop, "it would certainly have been against their traditions. And in times that we know more about, nobody has ever questioned the honor of the House."

Andrew looked up with a reserved smile.

"I don't think it's likely that anybody ever will."

He got up and started toward the house.

"I must have a talk with Leonard," he said.

When he had left them, Wannop turned to the others.

"Now and then you can see the old stock in Andrew; and, after all, he has a controlling interest in the firm."

"Andrew may not do much good," Hilda declared, "but he'll do Allinson's no harm. He'll stick to the best of the old traditions." She paused with a laugh. "Perhaps we're silly in our family pride and sometimes think ourselves better than

our neighbors with very little reason; but it's a clean pride. We're a mercantile family, but Allinson's has always ranked with the Bank of England."

When Andrew reached the library, his brother-in-law sat at a writing-table on which stood a tall silver lamp. The light fell in a sharply defined circle on the polished floor, which ran back beyond it into shadow. The windows at the western end were open and, for it was not quite dark yet, the long rows of bookcases, dimly visible against the wall, emphasized the spaciousness of the room. The scent of flowers that drifted in was mingled with the smell of a cigar, and as Andrew's footsteps echoed through the room Leonard laid down his pen. The strong light fell upon him, showing his thin face and tall, spare figure. His hair receded somewhat from his high forehead, and he had the colorless complexion of a man who lives much indoors; but his eyes were singularly penetrating. Dressed with fastidious neatness he had an air of elegance and, by comparison, made Andrew, who was of robuster build, look heavy and awkward.

"I'm glad of an excuse for stopping," he said. "Will you sit down and smoke?"

"What are you doing? I thought you came here for a rest," said Andrew, lighting a cigarette.

"The firm is a hard task-master, and it's difficult to get a few minutes undisturbed in town. That's why I brought these papers down. Writing a prospectus is a business which demands both caution and imagination. Would you like to see the draft?"

"I thought a boundless optimism was the most essential thing," Andrew replied, taking the paper handed him. "You're moderate," he continued when he had read it. "Ten per cent. is all you promise, though as far as my experience goes, twenty's the more usual thing."

"Allinson's does not promise more than it can fulfill."

"That's true and quite in accordance with my views. Until lately, however, prospectuses were very much out of our line."

Leonard was surprised and annoyed. Andrew was associating himself with the business in an unusual manner; although he had a right to do so.

"If there's anything you wish to ask, I shall be glad to explain it."

"These underwritten shares—I suppose you're letting the fellows have them below par? Is that because you expect any difficulty in getting the money?"

"No; any project we're connected with will be taken up. Still, when you launch a good thing, it's policy to let a few members of the ring in at bottom and give them a share of the pickings."

Andrew frowned.

"It sounds like a bribe. But these pickings? They must come out of the shareholders' pockets."

"In the end, they do."

"Though I'm not a business man, it seems to me that capital put into shafts and reducing plant stands a fair chance of being productive. That spent in starting the concern is largely wasted."

"We are spending less than usual. May I ask what your idea of the object of floating a company is?"

"Mine would be the expectation of getting a good dividend on the stock I took in it."

Leonard looked amused.

"Excellent, so far as it goes; but there's sometimes a little more than that."

Andrew sat silent a while. Then he said:

"I gather that this new scheme will be subscribed for because Allinson's guarantees it."

"It's impossible to guarantee a mining scheme, but, in a sense, you're right. The firm's name will count."

"Well," said Andrew, "I'd like to go to Canada and take some share in starting things—you see, I know the country. Then, as I suppose some of my money will be put into the business, you might, perhaps, make me a director. I'd be of no use in London, but I might do something in Canada."

Leonard was surprised, but the suggestion pleased him. The name of Andrew Allinson would have its influence on investors.

"It is not a bad idea," he said. "We'll see what can be done."

Andrew then changed the subject.

"How's business generally?"

"Pretty fair; we have made some profitable ventures in South America. You will remember my bringing Señor Piñola down? We made some money out of him."

"How?" Andrew asked without much interest. "The fellow had a dash of the nigger or Indian in him."

"He was Dictator Valhermosa's secret agent."

"Then you supported Valhermosa's administration during the unsuccessful revolution?"

"We did. They wanted to re-arm the troops quietly in preparation; Piñola came over to buy new rifles and machine-guns, and as he couldn't pay ready money we arranged the matter. There was a risk, but we got some valuable concessions as security, and turned them over afterward to a German syndicate on excellent terms."

Andrew's face was grim when he looked up.

"And I gave Piñola two days' shooting instead of pitching him into the nearest bog! To think of Allinson's backing that brute Valhermosa is somewhat of a shock."

"What do you know about him?"

"A good deal. Warren, the naturalist who was with me in Canada, spent some time in his country and has friends there. He used to talk about the things he'd seen, and the memory of his stories makes me savage yet, because I believe them. I have other acquaintances who have lived in parts of the world that business men don't often reach. If you don't know how rubber's collected and minerals are worked in countries where there's a subject native population, you'd better not find out." Andrew broke into a harsh laugh.

"You didn't suspect that while the firm helped the Dictator, I, its sleeping partner, gave Warren a check for the rebels, and I'd like to think that every cartridge my money bought accounted for one of the brutes who flog women to death and burn Indians at the stake when the revenue falls off."

Leonard looked grieved.

"I'm sorry to hear this; though it's possible that Warren was exaggerating. Anyway, we're out of it now. The deal was a matter of business—we couldn't be expected to know what was being done in the back-country, and after all it's no concern of ours."

Lighting another cigarette, Andrew smoked half of it in silence.

"The thing will hardly bear speaking of," he said finally; "and the fault is partly mine for not taking the interest in the firm I should have done."

He paused and looked Leonard steadily in the face.

"From what I've heard, those concessions may be good for another two or three years; and then, when Valhermosa's victims revolt again, if Allinson's can take any hand in the matter, it will be on the other side. Now we'll let the subject drop."

Leonard acquiesced with a tolerant gesture, though he was disconcerted by Andrew's tone. It implied that his opinions would have to be considered in the future.

"By the way," Leonard said, "there's a matter I must mention, though it's delicate. I saw Judson this morning and he grumbled about the liberality you have shown of late."

"Judson's niggardliness has lost me one or two good tenants."

"It's possible; but he told me that you had let The Firs to Mrs. Olcott for ten pounds less than he could easily have obtained. As he's a talkative fellow and nothing is kept secret here, do you think you were wise in letting her have the place below its value?"

"You have been given a hint, Leonard. What do you know about Mrs. Olcott?"

"Nothing. The point is that nobody else seems to know anything. I merely wished to suggest that it might be well to be more cautious."

The color crept into Andrew's face.

"The next time you hear Mrs. Olcott mentioned you may say that her husband is a friend of mine; that he served with credit as captain through the recent war; and that he now holds a government post in West Africa, though the climate compelled him to leave his wife at home. Now, would you like a game of pool?"

Leonard said that he would be busy for a while, and when Andrew went out he leaned back in his chair to think. On the death of Andrew's father, he had been left in control of the business, though, as he had not brought much capital into the firm, his share of the profits was not large. There was a good deal to be paid over to members of the family and, getting tired of slow and steady progress, he had of late launched out into bold speculations.

Since his first advancement he had looked on his brother-in-law as an obstacle in his way, and had quietly strengthened his own position. He had made Andrew's brief business experience distasteful to him, by seeing that the young man was kept busy at monotonous tasks that he could take no interest in. Afterward, when Andrew retired from the counting-house, he had missed no opportunity for suggesting that he was right in doing so, because he was obviously unfitted for a commercial career. Now and then he went farther and hinted that the young man was not gifted

with much intelligence. It was, however, done cleverly; nobody realized that the impression that Andrew was something of a fool had originated with his brother-in-law, but in time it was generally held. This promised to make Leonard's position safer, because the firm was a family one, and though Andrew held a good deal of the capital, his opinion would not have much weight with his relatives.

Nevertheless, to some extent, Leonard was honest in what he had done. Andrew was undoubtedly not clever and Leonard believed that for him to have any say in matters would be detrimental to the firm. Now that he was inclined to assert his rights, it would be well to send him to Canada. This implied some risk, as there were matters connected with the mine which Leonard preferred to conceal, but it was unlikely that Andrew would make any undesirable discovery. However, as Andrew's inaptitude for business was taken for granted, it might be wise to give the family a reason for entrusting him with the post, and Leonard thought it could be supplied by making the most of his acquaintance with Mrs. Olcott. Having arrived at this conclusion, he dismissed the matter and busied himself with the prospectus.

CHAPTER III
A COUNCIL

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Hot sunshine flooded the Ghyllside lawn, but there was a belt of shadow beneath a copper beech, where a family group had gathered. Leonard sat in a basket-chair, talking to Mrs. Fenwood, an elderly widow with an austere expression; his wife and Gertrude Wannop were whispering over their teacups; Wannop, red-faced and burly, stood beside Robert Allinson, a solemn-looking clergyman.

"We have been here half an hour and not a word has been said yet upon the subject everybody's itching to talk about. We're a decorous lot," Wannop remarked, surveying the others with amusement. "Personally, I should be glad if we were allowed to go home without its being broached. It's hardly the thing to discuss Andrew's shortcomings round his table."

"There are times when it's a duty to overcome one's delicacy," Robert replied. "If I have been correctly informed, the matter demands attention. Hitherto the Allinsons have never given their neighbors cause to criticize their conduct."

"None of them? I seem to remember——"

"None of them," Robert interposed firmly. "There was once a malicious story about Arthur, but I am glad to say it was disproved. But this Mrs. Olcott, whom I haven't seen—I suppose she's attractive?"

Wannop smiled.

"Distinctly so; what's more, she has a forlorn and pathetic air which is highly fetching. Still, I'm convinced that