

A white wooden chair is decorated with several white and pink roses. A banner with the words 'MR & MRS' in gold letters is draped across the chair's back. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

***MAY
SINCLAIR***

***THE TYSONS
(MR. AND
MRS. NEVILL
TYSON)***

May Sinclair

The Tysons (Mr. and Mrs. Nevill Tyson)

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CHAPTER I

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MR. NEVILL TYSON

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There were only two or three houses in Drayton Parva where Mr. and Mrs. Nevill Tyson were received. A thrill of guilty expectation used to go through the room when they were announced, and people watched them with a fearful interest, as if they were the actors in some enthralling but forbidden drama.

Perhaps, if she had been tried by a jury of her peers—but Mrs. Nevill Tyson had no peers in Drayton Parva. She was tried by an invisible and incorruptible jury of ideas in Miss Batchelor's head. Opinion sways all things in Drayton Parva, and Miss Batchelor swayed opinion.

As for Mr. Nevill Tyson, he had dropped into Leicestershire from heaven knows where, and was understood to be more or less on his trial. Nobody knew anything about him, except that he was a nephew of old Tyson of Thorneytoft, and had come in for the property. Nobody cared much for old Tyson of Thorneytoft; he was not exactly—well, no matter, he was very respectable and he was dead, which entitled him to a little consideration. And as Mr. Nevill Tyson was an unmarried man in those days he naturally attracted some attention on his own account, as well as for the sake of the very respectable old man, his uncle.

He was first seen at a dinner at the Morleys. Somebody else happened to be the guest of the evening, and somebody else took Lady Morley in to dinner. Tyson took Miss Batchelor, and I don't think he quite liked it. Miss Batchelor was clever—frightfully clever—but she never showed up well in public; she had a nervous manner, and a way of looking at you as if you were some curious animal that she would like to pat if she were perfectly sure you were not dangerous. And when you were about to take compassion on her shyness, she startled you with a sudden lapse into self-possession. I can see her now looking at Tyson over the frills on her shoulder, with her thin crooked little mouth smiling slightly. She might well look, for Nevill Tyson's appearance was remarkable. He might have been any age between twenty-five and forty; as a matter of fact he was thirty-six. England had made him florid and Anglo-Saxon, but the tropics had bleached his skin and dried his straw-colored hair till it looked like hay. His figure was short and rather clumsily built, but it had a certain strength and determination; so had his face. The determination was not expressly stated by any single feature—the mouth was not what you would call firm, and the chin retreated ever so slightly in a heavy curve—but it was somehow implied by the whole. He gave you the idea of iron battered in all the arsenals of the world. Miss Batchelor wondered what he would have to say for himself.

He said very little, and looked at nobody, until some casual remark of his made somebody look at him. Then he began to talk, laconically at first, and finally with great fluency. It was all about himself, and everybody listened. He proved a good talker, as a man ought to be who has knocked about four continents and seen strange men and stranger women. You could tell that Miss Batchelor was interested, for she had turned round in her chair now and was looking him straight in the face. It seemed that he had worked his way

out to Bombay and back again. He had been reporter to half-a-dozen provincial papers. He had been tutor to Somebody's son at some place not specified. He had tried his hand at comic journalism in London and at cattle-driving in Texas, and had been half-way to glory as a captain of irregulars in the Soudanese war. No, nobody was more surprised than himself when that mystic old man left him Thorneytoft. He thought he had chucked civilization for good. For good? But—after his exciting life—wouldn't he find civilization a little—dull? (Miss Batchelor had a way of pointing her sentences as if she were speaking in parables.) Not in the country, there was hardly enough of it there, and he had never tried being a country gentleman before; he rather wanted to see what it was like. Wouldn't it be a little hard, if he had never—? He thought not. The first thing he should do would be to get some decent hunters.

Hunters were all very well, but had he no hobbies? No, he had not; the *bona fide* country gentleman never had hobbies. They were kept by amateur gentlemen retired from business to the suburbs. Here Sir Peter observed that talking of hobbies, old Mr. Tyson had a perfect—er—mania for orchids; he spent the best part of his life in his greenhouse. Mr. Nevill Tyson thought he would rather spend his in Calcutta at once.

A dark lean man who had arrived with Tyson was seen to smile frequently during the above dialogue. Miss Batchelor caught him doing it and turned to Tyson. "Captain Stanistreet seemed rather amused at the notion of your being a fine old country gentleman."

"Stanistreet? I daresay. But he knows nothing about it, I assure you. He has the soul of a cabman. He measures everything by its distance from Charing Cross."

"I see. And you—are all for green fields and idyllic simplicity?"

He bowed, as much as to say, "I am, if you say so."

Miss Batchelor became instantly self-possessed.

"You won't like it. Nothing happens here; nothing ever will happen. You will be dreadfully bored."

"If I am bored I shall get something to do. I shall dissipate myself in a bland parochial patriotism. I can feel it coming on already. When I once get my feet on a platform I shall let myself go."

"Do. You'll astonish our simple Arcadian farmers. Nothing but good old Tory melodrama goes down here. Are you equal to that?"

"Oh yes. I'm terrific in Tory melodrama. I shall bring down the house."

She turned a curious scrutinizing look on him.

"Yes," said she, "you'll bring down the house—like Samson among the Philistines."

He returned her look with interest. "I should immensely like to know," said he, "what you go in for. I'm sure you go in for something."

She looked at her plate. "Well, I dabble a little in psychology."

"Oh!" There was a moment's silence. "Psychology is a large order," said Tyson, presently.

"Yes, if you go in deep. I'm not deep. I'm perfectly happy when I've got hold of the first principles. It sounds dreadfully

superficial, but I'm not interested in anything but principles."

"I'm sorry to hear it, for in that case you won't be interested in me."

She laughed nervously. She was accustomed to be rallied on her attainments, but never quite after this fashion.

"Why not?"

"Because I haven't any principles."

She bent her brows; but her eyes were smiling under her frown.

"You really mustn't say these things here. We are so dreadfully literal. We might take you at your word."

Tyson smiled, showing his rather prominent teeth unpleasantly.

"I wish," said she, "I knew what you think a country gentleman's duties really are."

"Do you? They are three. To hunt hard; to shoot straight; and to go to church."

"I hope you will perform them—all."

"I shall—all. No—on second thoughts I draw the line at going to church. It's all very well if you've got a private chapel, or an easy chair in the chancel, or a family vault you can sit in. But I detest these modern arrangements; I object to be stuck in a tight position between two boards, with my feet in somebody else's hat, and somebody else's feet in mine, and to have people breathing down my collar and hissing and yelling alternately, in my ear."

Again Miss Batchelor drew her eyebrows together in a friendly frown of warning. She liked the cosmopolitan Tyson and his reckless speech, and she had her own reasons for wishing him to make a good impression. But her hints had roused in him the instinct of antagonism, and he went on more recklessly than before. "No; you are perfectly wrong. I'm not an interesting atheist. I have the most beautiful child-like faith in—"

"The God who was clever enough to make Mr. Nevill Tyson?" said Miss Batchelor, very softly. She had felt the antagonism, and resented it.

At this point Sir Peter came down with one of those tremendous platitudes that roll conversation out flat. That was his notion of the duty of a host, to rush in and change the subject just as it was getting exciting. The old gentleman had destroyed many a promising topic in this way, under the impression that he was saving a situation.

"You'll be bored to death—I give you six months," were Miss Batchelor's parting words, murmured aside over her shoulder.

On their way home Stanistreet congratulated Tyson.

"By Jove! you've fallen on your feet, Tyson. They tell me Miss Batchelor is interested in you."

"I am not interested in Miss Batchelor. Who is she?"

"She is only Miss Batchelor of Meriden Court—the richest land-owner in Leicestershire."

"Good heavens! Why doesn't somebody marry her?"

"Miss Batchelor, they say, is much too clever for that."

"Is she?" And Tyson laughed, a little brutally.

Of course everybody called on the eccentric newcomer when they saw that the Morleys had taken him up. But before they had time to ask each other to meet him, Mr. Nevill Tyson had imported his own society from Putney or Bohemia, or some of those places.

That was his first mistake.

The next was his marriage. In fact, for a man in Tyson's insecure position, it was more than a mistake; it was madness. He ought to have married some powerful woman like Miss Batchelor, a woman with ideas and money and character, to say nothing of an inviolable social reputation. But men like Tyson never do what they ought. Miss Batchelor was clever, and he hated clever women. So he married Molly Wilcox. Molly Wilcox was nineteen; she had had no education, and, what was infinitely worse, she had a vulgar mother. And as Mr. Wilcox might be considered a negligible quantity, the chances were that she would take after her mother.

The mystery was how Tyson ever came to know these people. Mr. Wilcox was a student and an invalid; moreover, he was excessively morose. He would not have called, and even Mrs. Wilcox could hardly have called without him. Scandal-mongers said that Tyson struck up an acquaintance with the girl and her mother in a railway carriage somewhere between Drayton and St. Pancras, and had called on the strength of it. It did great credit to his imagination that he could see the makings of Mrs. Nevill Tyson in Molly Wilcox, dressed according to her mother's taste, with that hair of hers all curling into her eyes in front, and rumpled up anyhow behind. However, though I daresay his introduction was a little informal and obscure, there was every reason for the intimacy that followed. The Wilcoxes

were unpopular; so, by this time, was Tyson. In cultivating him Mrs. Wilcox felt that she was doing something particularly esoteric and rather daring. She had taken a line. She loved everything that was a little flagrant, a little out of the common, and a little dubious. To a lady with these tastes Tyson was a godsend; he more than satisfied her desire for magnificence and mystery. For economical reasons Mrs. Wilcox's body was compelled to live with Mr. Wilcox in a cottage in Drayton Parva; but her soul dwelt continually in a side-street in Bayswater, in a region haunted by the shabby-refined, the shabby-smart, and the innocently risky. Mrs. Wilcox, I maintain, was as innocent as the babe unborn. She believed that not only is this world the best of all possible worlds, but that Bayswater is the best of all possible places in it. So, though she was quite deaf to many of the chords in Tyson's being, her soul responded instantly to the note of "town." And when she discovered that Tyson had met and, what is more, dined with her old friends the Blundell-Thompsons "of Bombay," her satisfaction knew no bounds.

At any rate, Tyson had not been very long at Thorneytoft before Mrs. Wilcox found herself arguing with Mr. Wilcox. She herself was impervious to argument, and owing to her rapt inconsequence it was generally difficult to tell what she would be at. This time, however, she seemed to be defending Mr. Nevill Tyson from unkind aspersions.

"Of course, all young men are likely to be wild; but Mr. Tyson is not a young man."

"Therefore Mr. Tyson is not likely to be wild. Do you know you are guilty of the fallacy known to logicians as illicit process of the major?"

Mrs. Wilcox looked up in some alarm. The term suggested anything from a court-martial to some vague impropriety.

"The Major? Major who?" she inquired, deftly recovering her mental balance. "Where is he?"

"Somewhere about the premises, I fancy," said Mr. Wilcox, dryly. When all argument failed he had still a chastened delight in mystifying the poor lady.

Mrs. Wilcox looked out of the window. "Oh, I see; you mean Captain Stanistreet." She smiled; for where Captain Stanistreet was Mr. Nevill Tyson was not very far away. Moreover, she was glad that she had on her nice ultramarine tea-gown with the green *moiré* front. (They were wearing those colors in town that season.)

At Thorneytoft a few hours later Stanistreet's tongue was running on as usual, when Tyson pulled him up with a jerk. "Hold hard. Do you know you're talking about the future Mrs. Nevill Tyson?"

Stanistreet tried to keep calm, for he was poised on his waist across the edge of the billiard-table. As it was, he lost his balance at the critical moment, and it ruined his stroke. He looked at the cloth, then at his cue, with the puzzled air which people generally affect in these circumstances.

"Great Scott!" said he, "how did I manage that?"

The exclamation may or may not have referred to the stroke.

Tyson looked at his friend with a smile which suggested that he expected adverse criticism, and was prepared to deal temperately with it.

"Why not?" said he.

Stanistreet, however, said nothing. He was absorbed in chalking the end of his cue. His silence gave Tyson no chance; it left too much to the imagination.

"Have you any objection?"

"Well, isn't the lady a little young for a fine old country gentleman like yourself?"

Tyson's small blue eyes twinkled, for he prided himself on being able to take a joke at his own expense. Still it was not exactly kind of Stanistreet to remind him of his mushroom growth.

"Come," said Stanistreet, "you are a gentleman, you know. At any rate, you're about the only fellow in these parts who can stand a frock-coat and topper—that's the test. I saw Morley, your big man, going into church yesterday, and he looked as if he'd just sneaked out of the City on a 'bus. But you always knew how to dress yourself. The instinct is hereditary."

Louis had just made a brilliant series of cannons, and was marking fifty to his score. If he had not been so absorbed in his game, he would have seen that Tyson was angry; and Tyson when he was angry was not at all nice to see.

He made himself very stiff as he answered, "Whether I'm a gentleman or not I can't say. It's an abstruse question. But I've got the girl on my side, which is a point in my favor; I have the weighty support of my mamma-in-law elect; and—the prejudices of papa I shall subdue by degrees."

"By degrees? What degrees?" Again the question was unkind. It referred to a phase of Tyson's university career which he least liked to look back upon.

"And how about Mrs. Hathaway?"

"Damn Mrs. Hathaway," said Tyson.

"Poor lady, isn't she sufficiently damned already?"

The twinkle came back into Tyson's eyes, but there was gloom in the rest of his face. The twinkle was lost upon Stanistreet. He knew too much; and the awkward thing was that Tyson never could tell exactly how much he knew. So he wisely dropped the subject.

Stanistreet certainly knew a great deal; but he was the last man in the world to make a pedantic display of his knowledge; and Mr. Wilcox's prejudices remained the only obstacle to Tyson's marriage. It was one iron will against another, and the battle was long. Mr. Wilcox had the advantage of position. He simply retreated into his library as into a fortified camp, intrenching himself behind a barricade of books, and refusing to skirmish with the enemy in the open. And to every assault made by his family he replied with a violent fit of coughing. A well-authenticated lung-disease is a formidable weapon in domestic warfare.

At last he yielded. Not to time, nor yet to Tyson, nor yet to his wife's logic, but to the importunities of his lung-disease. Other causes may have contributed; he was a man of obstinate affections, and he had loved his daughter.

It was considered right that the faults of the dead (his unreasonable obstinacy, for instance) should be forgiven and forgotten. Death seemed to have made Mrs. Wilcox suddenly familiar with her incomprehensible husband. She was convinced that whatever he had thought of it on earth, in heaven, purged from all mortal weakness, Mr. Wilcox was taking a very different view of Molly's engagement.

He died in March, and Tyson married Molly in the following May. The bride is reported to have summed up the case thus: "Bad? I daresay he is. I'm not marrying him because he is good; I'm marrying him because he's delightful. And I'm every bit as bad as he is, if they only knew."

It was Mrs. Nevill Tyson's genius for this sort of remark that helped to make her reputation later on.

CHAPTER II

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MRS. NEVILL TYSON

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Tyson took his wife abroad for six months to finish her education (as if to be Tyson's wife was not education enough for any woman!); and Drayton Parva forgot about them for a time.

In fact, nobody had fully realized the existence of Molly Wilcox till she burst on them as Mrs. Nevill Tyson.

It was the first appearance of the bride and bridegroom on their return from their long honeymoon. The rector was giving an "At Home" (tentatively) in their honor; and a great many people had accepted, feeling that a very interesting social experiment was about to be made. Everybody remembers how Mrs. Nevill Tyson fluttered down into that party of thirty women to eleven men, in an absurd frock, and with a still more absurd air of assured welcome. Poor little woman! Her comings and goings from one Continental watering-place to another had been the progress of a triumphant divinity; where she found an hotel she left a temple. I sometimes think, too, that little look of expectant gladness may have been due to the feeling that the Rectory was in England, and England was home. She was dressed in the most perfect Parisian fashion, from the crown of her fur toque to the tips of her little shoes; but she had never learned to speak three words of French correctly. She informed everybody of the fact that afternoon, laughing with

the keenest enjoyment of her remarkable stupidity; it seemed that her *rôle* was to be remarkable in everything. However that may have been, in less than half an hour seven out of those eleven men were gathered round her chair in the corner; two out of the seven were the rector and Sir Peter Morley, and Mrs. Nevill Tyson was talking to all of them at once.

Mrs. Nevill Tyson—she was an illusion and a distraction from head to foot; her beauty made a promise to the senses and broke it to the intellect. Coil upon coil, and curl upon curl of dark hair, the dark eyes of some ruminant animal, a little frivolous curve in an intelligent nose, a lower jaw like a boy's, the full white throat of a woman, and the mouth and cheeks of a child just waked from sleep. Tyson had escaped one misfortune that had been prophesied for him. His wife was not vulgar. She sat at her ease (much more at her ease than Miss Batchelor), and chattered away about her honeymoon, her bad French, the places she had been to, the people she had seen, and all without any consciousness of her delightful self. Now it was a continuous stream of minute talk, growing shallower and shallower as it spread over a larger surface; and now her mind had hardly settled on its subject before it was off and away again like a butterfly. There was one advantage in this excessive lightness of touch, that it left great things as it found them, for great things lay lightly on her soul. She told everybody she had been to Rome; but imagination simply, refused to picture Mrs. Nevill Tyson in Rome. Her presence in the Eternal City seemed something less than her footprint in its dust or her shadow on its walls. Nothing is more irritating than to have your dream of a place destroyed by the light-hearted gabble of some idiot who has seen it; but Mrs. Nevill Tyson spared your dreams. The most delicate ideal would have been undisturbed by the soft sweep of her