

A Circle in the Sand

By Kate Jordan

Author of "The Kiss of Gold," "The Other House," etc., etc.

CHAPTER VIII.

By the main door, however, even the most careless in the office of The Citizen had commented upon the change in Donald Sefain. He was no longer the voluntary recluse, a man parading his virtues, eager to be judged by his alone. He had learned to believe in his capabilities. His lettered nature, feeding on all that was rotten, had risen like a dazed, hungry thing following an instinct for better food and freedom. Amputation, a rebellious prisoner always, had revived in him after he had striven so cruelly to it. It called to him in the long nights, in his lonely walks, and his voice was somehow Anne's:

"What have you done with your life?"

The assertion of his best instincts had left their marks upon the outer man. His antagonism and gloom had almost vanished; so had his untidiness and air of general dissoluteness. He carried himself better, his clothes were better, and they were worn as if he respected them and himself.

As his habits mended and his work steadily improved David Temple treated him as a worker whom he prized. A closer degree of intimacy between the two men seemed impossible. They saw each other seldom, save in the office. But Anne was the friend of both.

David visited her less often than in the summer, his engagements were so many, but every hour he could spare was spent in her pretty, but of the way rooms. He let the social mask fall when with her as with no one else. Any one seeing him pacing up and down her room, a privileged cigarette between his fingers, as he indulged in brilliant nonsense, laughing like a boy when he pulled her pet theories to bits as if he blew away loose rose petals, would scarcely have known him.

Anne loved these hours with him, and her happiness went with her, absorbing her thoughts to the detriment of the art so dear to her. The men lay dry upon the sheets of her novel. She no longer struggled against the passionate effacement of self in another's being. She did not torment her heart by looking for a growing love in David's eyes. She was content to drift. It was evident to all he was very fond of her. He sought her familiarly. She knew nothing of his life beyond the small horizon of her own, and feeling an anticipative joy which seemed to melt her future with his, she was content.

Dr. Ericsson had much to engross him and keep him away. The wild winter weather had brought the usual illnesses, and the Waverly place house was in chaos, preparing for the arrival of his wife and daughter after an absence of eight years.

Anne had plenty of leisure, and she gave much of it to Donald Sefain. Between them they made some of those winter nights idle of joy for little Joe Evans. Giving and receiving, they sought to rest after inured hardship seemed like giving way to grief, and his weak body collapsed.

He was in Donald's home, a trio of small rooms in a street a short distance from The Citizen. They were cheap apartments, but hopelessly clean, presided over by a "lone" woman, Mrs. Mulligan, who lived on the floor beneath.

Anne often went home with Donald in the quick winter dusk, and, stepping from the hall into the bright light, she would feel as if summer had come across the snow and kissed her. The room was always sweet smelling from a bunch of flowers, the kettle always singing, the lamp shaded.

"Ah, Joe, dear, if you had seen me when I was young!" she had surprised Mrs. Mulligan saying once as she knitted beside the pillow chair where Joe reclined, pale from the languor of unhealthy sleep. "There was a sight for ye! The girls of today with their crotched in bodies and white cheeks stuck to the bone—what are they? Ah, avick, girls were different in my toime! Why, I shtud a lot stone, weighed in me stockings. Me hair was long, and I had eaves on both sides of me head, planna, 'twas so thick. As for me cheeks," she added in climactic triumph, "they shuck out like apples and were that red yod broed behind them with a shtraw."

On nights like these, Donald's nature seemed to expand and exult. He surprised Anne by his humor, his mocking grace as host, his boyish play with Joe.



Bending over the decaying fire, he had played for them. Sometimes when he read aloud after dinner and Mrs. Mulligan sat motionless as a sphinx save for the darting needles, Anne knelt on the floor, her arms around the boy. His feverish mouth would creep close to her ear and he would tell her how he loved Mr. Sefain and how he was never to go back to the mine, never. Anne would assure him of this while holding him to her and kissing him in a little storm of love, and then her eyes would rove over him, his hands with no more substance than claws, dry and hot, his hungry eyes seeming to hold life like a picture before them in an endeavor to see all quickly before the short day ended.

It was Donald who showed Anne some of the singular sides of the city's life.

During this season of pure frost when the electric wires spanning the city were turned into glacial ribbons and the noise of traffic on the frozen ground was like the clamor from brass, she often found herself treading the narrow, uphill streets in the lower quarter of the city to see some marvelous "find" of his.

Once it was an old Russian musician, a political exile. The room they found him in was wretched, but in a corner stood a marvelous copper fit for a prince's table. This and the Amati on

the old man's knee were the only visible relics of a sumptuous past. Bending over the decaying fire, he had played for them wild and terrible music, which awoke strange fancies. It seemed to waft up of a spirit haunting a familiar but empty house, where moonlight streamed through the bare windows; it shrieked of shipwreck, mumbled of witches dancing in a haggard dawn, prayed for life while the block and the headman waited. The unspeakable desolation of the exile's life, it had haunted her for days.

Although working in the office of a world known newspaper, she had never seen the wonders of the mechanism used in its construction until one midnight Donald took her down to the pressroom. There was a weighty but soundless vibration as she went down the stone stairs, but when the iron door was pushed back the noise was so tremendous it leaped out like a bar and struck her. A gust of air accompanied it which seemed to suck her down the ladderlike stairway against her will until, dazed and bewildered, she stood on a little bridge overlooking a plateau of steel that leaped and shivered in gigantic sockets. Bare chert men like sweating pygmies stood between the big machines, and above them, a monster of many jaws, the roaring press snapped up the paper. On the first page there was a portrait of a murderer, and this was repeated all over the gaunt space. On every side the sinister visage with eyes turned obliquely toward her came riding into view, and the glittering clamps seized it, seemed to crush it furiously until, like the stone Sisyphus, rolled it up and down again, and the task was necessarily continued.

It was Donald who showed her the underground restaurants where the newspaper "hacks" plunged in the early morning hours for coffee that was a long and bitter matter from the noise of the town and waited upon by a genial French host and his wife, they had seemed in Paris, for the secretive niche in the crowded street might have strayed from one of Hugo's stories and settled, out of countenance, in a commercial atmosphere.

Together they went to well known studios where all was harmony and beauty—idols somberly contemplative, mediæval windows, wood carving from India and rugs from Patmos. She had watched the last tones of a landscape, had seen a sculptor make lips of clay smile as if he had called life there.

Donald had taken her behind the scenes of a theater, and she had watched the progress of a play from the wings, had gazed with critical eyes and a sense of illusory loss at the mechanism of what had so often enchanted her—exits, entrances, cues and prompter's book.

And they had read much together—the exquisite prose of Henry James and Mallarme, Kipling's crushing phrases painting the arid glitter of India, "Tess," bare armed and fawn eyed, loving tragically in a setting of clover and dawn mists; the fatalism of the "Rubbishy" and the wholesome cynicism of Thackeray.

They shared all together as comrades and confidants. The boy in Donald and the piquant schoolgirl only masked in the woman clasped hands and laughed.

CHAPTER IX.

One morning late in January Anne opened the sheets of The Citizen and saw this item among the shipping news:

"Among the passengers on the Tontonic, which arrived in port last night, were Mrs. Lamsius Ericsson and Miss Olga Ericsson. The latter is the latest of our young countrywomen to return to America with a London reputation for beauty."

Five years later Anne stepped from the raw afternoon into Dr. Ericsson's house. Her aunt had been in charge but a little while, yet the old house under her reign possessed what Anne felt it never could have had without her. A maid who was inoffensive of voice and light of step took up her card, an open fire invited her, the aromatic odor of green things growing in a winter room filled the air, the light was toned to a pale yellow, as if a sunset had happened prematurely. It was evident Mrs. Ericsson had a genius for selecting the salient requisites of an inviting home.

"Anne Garrick," said a languid voice behind her, "how d'you do?"

She turned to face the aunt she but faintly remembered, a small, nervous woman, pale haired, anxious eyed, so restless she seemed like one half pausing in a hurry before continuing the pursuit of something.

"How like your pale cheek to mine and exclaimed:

"How like your father. You're a Garrick. You are not a Gerard."

The infection was disapproving. Anne felt guilty for not looking like her over to a togoe. It's simply madness to insist on a brim when nobody is wearing one."

Again Anne felt like a culprit. The felt and feather creation on her head had a brim. Useless to expect to find favor in her aunt's eyes, since, looking like her father, she came wearing a big hat.

"Here's Anne Garrick at last." And Mrs. Ericsson entered a big bay windowed room as inviting as fluted swiss curtains and pale green appointments could make it.

A young woman was beside a window, a manicure set spread out on a small table before her, and she was examining a pink nail, much as a jeweler does the springs of a watch.

"You dear thing! How are you?" she said, going to meet Anne, and they kissed each other.

"Let me look at you, Olga," said Anne, turning her to the light. "I've heard you are beautiful. Mr. Tinkie,

our society editor, saw you at the opera last night and has talked about you all the evening."

Olga lifted her head lazily in a challenging way and with a purring laugh. "Upon my word, fancy," she said with an English accent as Anne looked at her. "What do you think? Am I?"

Few women could have welcomed criticism in that green toned setting and raw light. The two emphatic qualities of Olga's beauty, ethereality and delicacy, did not suffer. She was extraordinarily white. The skin on simple throat and quiet cheek was of almost silvery pallor. Moonlight seemed bathing her pale blond hair. Her greenish gray eyes were dreamy, the pupils large; her upper lip very short, full and coral pink. "A moonlight maid," the artists in Paris had called her. There was not a heavy note in her coloring. The blond brilliancy of some Swedish ancestor lived again in her, some "flower of northern snows," and with it the delicate American features of her mother. She was of average height, and though slight her body had a delicate robustness. She wore a white flannel robe loosely belted, and her hair hung in a plait to her waist.

"You don't mind my going to the table this way? I am lazy, but we are on family," she said, strolling into the hall. "Mamma hates me to do it, but I simply cannot dress for lunch. I'm as stiff as a German cavalryman all the afternoon and night. I must have a little freedom."

In the dining room they found Dr. Ericsson. He drew Anne to him and gave her a bearlike hug.

"Is this your debut as a family man?" she asked.

"No, my second appearance. I'm getting used to the limelight. I met David Temple coming up town last night and prevailed on him to dine with us."

"What a charming man he is," exclaimed Mrs. Ericsson, and from the commencement of the meal, with short intervals of rest, Anne was put through a catechism by her aunt about David Temple. Her tongue played between her lips restlessly, while a minister of money, character and possible attachments were inquired after minutely and with an appraiser's air. When the cross examination was finished, Anne had a feeling that David had been tickled and put away with other tickled matrimonial possibilities.

The pauses in this research were filled by a recital of Olga's past and coming triumphs, what she must and must not do, who was worth her knowing and who was not.

Anne was glad to get back to the green and white room, the door closed, and only Olga there, looking at her with amused eyes.

"Look here, Anne, isn't she harrowing? Do you wonder how I stand up there ought to be a law for the suppression of unbecoming relations. Mamma is really impossible."

She flung herself into a rocker and took one foot into the embrace of her hand. Suddenly she burst out laughing.

"Anne Garrick, you've a very expressive face. You don't envy me, although I'm a beauty and the only daughter of an adoring mother."

She took a thin cigarette from a silver box on the table.

"Have one. You don't smoke? You don't know what a comfort it is."

"But doesn't your mother object?" asked Anne, making herself comfortable among a heap of cushions.

"Of course. What doesn't she object to? She doesn't want me to eat potatoes lest they make me fat nor to take cold baths, because they make me blue. She fobs me hard every night, because one little pink vein—see it—shows. She almost cries when I do my hair high and takes to her bed if I insist on more than one cup of coffee. I am not allowed to spend a penny as I please nor to have an original idea about a gown or hat. In fact, I'm my mother's stock in hand, which she is always pol-

ishing, preserving, trying. It's very trying. Shall I tell you how I manage to endure this continual censorship mixed with servile worship—for mamma does adore me? A pioneer never regarded a finished cabin, every stick of which had been laid by his own hands, with more satisfaction than she does me. She does not seem to give papa any share in my being at all.

"I think I know what your tactics are," said Anne, scrutinizing her good humoredly. "You're very soft and white. You seem to move in an atmosphere of amiability, but I have not forgotten your early propensity for sticking pins nor the educated way your little nails could scratch. You could scratch still, Olga, if that were necessary, but you have found a surer way of gaining your way."

"You've hit it. What's the use of continual dissent? Why worry this one little life out of yourself? You want your own way—take it. Be attentive to all the rules laid down for your conduct, then ignore them and smile. When you're found out and reproaches are showered on you, think of something else or go to sleep."

She lit another cigarette with a ruminative expression and clasped her hands behind her head. The look in her eyes was like that of a mild baby trying to diagnose a snubman.

"Really, you know, if mamma would only rest her tired little body and head and leave me to myself she'd be very wise. She has nothing to fear from me. I know what's expected of me. My poor mother, we're in my marrying a poor man. Could anything be more absurd? Nothing in the world will ever be as dear to me as my personal comfort. For a girl to go into business life you may save down, making her own way, working, struggling, beyond my understanding. Some one must always support me, Anne, and support me well."

"I wonder you came back to America without a title or at least a fortune."

"I could have married money several times, and a lot of it," said Olga, "but unfortunately I distinctly disliked the men. It wouldn't do to marry a man you couldn't for the life of you be civil to. Would it?"

"Oh, I don't know! Aren't you over-sensitive?"

The laughter in Anne's tone did not disturb Olga. She pursed out her lips and nodded.

"I almost caught a title too. This is the way I missed it. For, one thing, mamma's caprices frightened him. I'm sure he could see her shake as soon as he appeared. I'm sure he saw her judge me. But that wouldn't have seriously mattered if he hadn't found me out."

Her lips curled in a one-sided smile. "I can laugh now, but really it was provoking at the time. Val—dear thing he was—hated the least touch of unbecomingly in a woman, and smacking he considered only a little better than swearing. By the way, I'm telling you the truth about myself, Anne. It's such a relief to tell it. I never do except to relatives. With men it's impossible not to pose; they expect so much. Well, my dear, I posed for Val for six long, weary months. I played the little lamb, always with a burst of neediness, practicing the Madonna gaze, taking only one glass of champagne at dinners and declining cigarettes with a shy, reproachful glance. He used to tell me I was his ideal, that it seemed profane to love and adore American women. It was about when she fashioned me like an angel, etc. One day he walked into Morley's, where I was having my portrait done, and found me with Mrs. Sutton Vane, a little monkey of a woman with a fast manner, and whom he particularly detested. We had a bet on as to which could blow the roughest rings of smoke. I, his Madonna, his angel, his snow flower, won, while he, unseen by me, watched. Sudden business called him away just as he was about absorbing he never came back. Mamma has sat up nights with her finger to her forehead wondering why. I am all blank amazement when the subject is broached. And here ends the romance of Lord Valentino Dunworthy. It went up in smoke."

"You weren't a bit in love with him?"

"In love? No. I never loved anything but this. Listen!"

She went to the mirror and looked into it steadily for a moment, then turned to Anne, her whole expression changed. The laziness of glance vanished. She flung up her head and laughed joyously. To Anne's amazement she called him away just as he was about absorbing he never came back. Mamma has sat up nights with her finger to her forehead wondering why. I am all blank amazement when the subject is broached. And here ends the romance of Lord Valentino Dunworthy. It went up in smoke."

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