

His Own People

By Cameron Nelles Wilson

"GOOD BYE—and is this the end?" He spoke in a toneless whisper as his fingers tightened over the slight hand that lay within his own. With the faintest trace of effort he straightened himself, throwing back his head in a manner now grown familiar to the white-capped nurse.

It was all over—the four weeks of racking pain and agonized delirium, the three of tedious convalescence—and now with his coat buttoned tightly over a sensitive throat, his hat in hand, Noel Adams awaited the cab that was to bear him back to a world of renewed action.

The girl shuddered as she glanced from a window of the ward, where, in the company of this man, she had spent the fullest, happiest weeks of her hospital work. Within these bare walls she had fought with higher powers, determined, resolute, lost to all save the magnitude of her task. She had won out, had made good, and this was the end.

The day of his release had come, to him the signal for battle, to her the muffled requiem of dead dreams. Before her stretched an endless vista of gray days, of work lacking in motive, of passionate desire and lonely desolation.

She turned from the window in the dim twilight and faced him with the finality of despair upon her white face. His serious eyes were upon her, and the usual happy smile was gone from his lips.

"Diana!" His arms opened to her; without a word she surrendered herself to him in an abandon of gladness.

"It doesn't seem right—I hadn't intended to speak yet, dear," he whispered. "You know nothing of me but what I have told you—my life as a struggling newspaper man, my hopes as a climber. I know that my people are not of your kind, and I can't take your answer until you have seen them—have seen their way of living. It wouldn't be fair."

"Thy people shall be my people—you know the rest, Noel. I am marrying you, not your family, but I know that they must be everything that is best or—they wouldn't be your people."

He kissed her, reverently, as she clung to him with words of frenzied assurance. Slowly the shadows deepened. A gentle tap sounded upon the door.

D. I, dear—how lovely! Just in time for dessert. Thomson—a chair for Miss Saunders."

Agnes Osborne drew her sister to her side, caressing one of her ungloved hands. Five people waved or bowed their greeting to the unexpected guest as, without ceremony, Diana took her place at the table, over whose glories softly shaded candles diffused a mellow glow. The merry badinage, the hum of conversation, changed into a volley of questionings regarding Diana and her work. Living outside of the social whirl, she was still part of their world, interested in the round of dinners, the hands at bridge, as much as in the broader interests of her own work. She would drop into her old place among them as naturally as if she had never passed from out the daily reckoning of the little set in which she had moved.

"Well, dear, and how is everything? Did the poor wee colored baby die? What of your special—are you freed at last?"

"Yes, and—no. Lean over and I'll tell you my secret."

A gasp of incredulity broke from Mrs. Osborne's lips. One of Diana's hands rested lightly upon her sister's gleaming shoulder and her fingers nervously tapped the jewels that blazed in a necklace of barbaric splendor.

"Diana, dear! Engaged! My esteemed friends," with a comprehensive glance about the table, "it is my pleasant duty to announce the engagement of my sister, Miss Diana Saunders, to—to—my dear, you've not even told me his name!"

"Adams—Noel Adams." She spoke the words with a timidity born of tender unfamiliarity.

"Then congratulations are in order, Diana?" A pretty woman arose from her chair and, leaning over, kissed Diana on both crimson cheeks. The others did likewise, while the men expressed their



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felicitations with handshaking and friendly railery.

"To the health of the future Mistress Adams," cried their hostess laughingly. The clinking of glasses, the silent toast, brought tears to Diana's eyes. Seizing an empty glass, she filled it with trembling hand, and stood before them in her simple uniform of blue and white.

"Thank you! And, now, will you drink to the health of my future husband, Noel Adams?"

"Noel Adams," cried they all heartily, and resumed their places.

"And when shall we meet him, Di? What is he like? Tall? Good looking, of course—that goes without saying. Why didn't you bring him in to-night?"

"Tonight? Why, he was only released tonight. He had to go to his own people."

"His own people, of course," assented Mrs. Osborne. "Who are they, Di? The Adams—is it the Valancey Adams?"

"No—no. His father—well, Agnes, to tell you the truth, I don't know his father's name." The girl's cheeks flushed a deeper crimson as she realized the impression which this confession must make.

"Di—how funny! Do they live near us—anywhere near the park?"

"It's a long way from here—three miles I should think. Clancy street, wherever that is."

One of the men gave a quick glance across the table, but kept to himself any information that he may have possessed.

"Tom," addressing her husband, "do you know where Clancy street is?"

"I don't suppose you will have heard of it, Agnes. His people live quietly—very quietly. I am to meet them tomorrow," interrupted Diana.

"Another engagement dinner? Child, you'll die of fatty degeneration before your wedding. Well—I'll see you through the ordeal, dear, and you may have that old Satsuma bowl for your bottom drawer."

"Thank you, sister mine. You're a darling."

"Come—let us all go into the library for coffee. You men may smoke there. I hate to think of all the good stories we miss when you linger behind. Your arm, Mr. Keith—you may take mine, bride-elect."

With much laughter and polite holdings back the little party passed from the room.

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THEY dismounted from a stuffy car, splashed through the muddy road and walked quickly down a street bordered by long rows of houses exactly similar, hideously designed, shabbily executed.

"Here we are—and they're looking for us." Several faces disappeared from a front window and the door was thrown wide. Adams took Diana by the hand and led her within the badly illuminated

hall to present his fiance.

"Mother, this is Diana."

"Well—and so you're the future Mrs. Adams! Come right in. Girls, take Dinah's coat and hat. This is Susie, Dinah—"

"Diana, mother," gently corrected her son.

"Oh, my, yes—Diana. I mind now. Higgins had a bay mare called Diana because her back was shaped like the moon—they was neighbors of ours down the country. Now, this is Leda, Dinah—Diana, I mean, and—Nellie, don't be so silly—come out from that room! She's the shy one of the family, he-ha!"

In turn the three sisters were presented. Susie gave her a resounding smack upon each cheek; Leda extended a limp hand, while Nellie was seized with such a fit of giggling that Diana stood uncomfortably awaiting developments.

"Silly! She's always like that when we want her to play propriety." Mrs. Adams gave her a push that sent her headlong into the parlor.

"Well—everything's ready 'cept that lazy Reggie. He's always behind—specially when he knows there's company. And pa was real sorry that this was his night on the road. His train is runnin' on a new route and now he's out every other night. Susie, fetch in the chicken and dish up them vegetables."

As in a dream Diana entered the dining room. Her place was next to Noel, who was tenderly solicitous of her comfort. The table was spotless, crowded to the utmost limit with a variety of edibles. A centerpiece of dried grasses was surrounded by pickles of many kinds, plates of buns and fragrant biscuit. Four kinds of cake, uncut, one of them adorned with a circle of chocolate mice, preserved the symmetry to a nicety, while the beautifully browned chicken was flanked by steaming vegetables and an ornate salad.

The effusive hospitality of the family failed to put Diana at her ease. She was not hungry, but the insistence of his people crowded her plate to a condition of unappetizing repletiness.

When the meal was well under way his brother appeared—an insignificant looking boy of the neat, commercial type.

"So you're the new sister, eh? Ma and I have been wondering when we'll see the last of the other three. They don't seem in demand. But it's up to Nolie to look after you, sis."

He took his seat and hungrily devoted himself to his plate.

It seemed to Diana as if the meal would never end. Her tongue was tied; she felt distressingly uncomfortable. Her eyes wandered from the conglomeration upon the table to the hideous chromos upon the wall, from these to the faces of her future relations.

GLADLY she arose at last and followed his mother into the parlor. An organ occupied the chief place in the room. Large-sized family portraits done in crayon covered most of the walls, interspersed with decorated butter-bowls, a gilded dustpan, and a miniature rolling pin covered with plush.

She and Noel sat upon the rickety sofa, whereon, the mother informed them, she had done most of her courting, giving Diana a friendly punch to emphasize the joke.

Then Nellie sang—a sentimental ballad rendered in a nasal contralto, the accompaniment of which abounded in such stirring chords that the stuffed canary upon the piano tottered almost to destruction.

To Diana it was all grotesquely tragic. Her thoughts flew to the little dinner of the previous evening, to the social hour in the tasteful, luxurious library.

Her mind, filled with the contrast, turned in loathing from this new experience. Future complications crowded into her brain and she realized how impossible it all was. Association with such people as these and, yet—they were his own people!

He was of their kind—he must be. Behind all his cleverness and charm of manner, behind his beauty and natural intelligence was this hideous background of incongruities from which the cloven