V. V.'s Eyes eBook

V. V.'s Eyes by Henry Sydnor Harrison

Contents

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Page 1

DR. VIVIAN

Carlisle became conscious of a certain excitement. She hoped very much that they hadn't read out the names of subscribers yet.

She was late, so there was nobody to show her in. From the sidewalk she stepped under a queer little portico, which seemed to waft one back to a previous century. Here, at the vestibule step, she was obliged to move carefully to avoid treading on two dirty little denizens of the neighborhood, who knew no better than to block the way of the quality. They were little Jew girls,—little Goldnagels, in short,—and while one of them sat and played at jackstones with a flat-looking rubber ball, the other and smaller lay prone upon her stomach, weeping with passionate abandon.

Her agonized wails indicated the end of the world, and worse. Carlisle said kindly:

"What's the matter, little girl?"

The lamenting one, who was about four years old, rolled around and regarded the lady with a contorted face. Her wails died to a whimper: but then, curiosity satisfied and no solace offering, she burst forth as with an access of mysterious pain.

"Did she hurt herself?" said Carlisle, third-personally, to the elder girl, who had suspended her game to stare wide-eyed. "What on earth is the matter?"

The reply was tragically simple:

"*A Lady stepped on her Junebug*."

Sure enough, full on the vestibule floor lay the murdered slumbug, who had too hardily ventured to cross a wealthy benevolent's path. The string was yet tied to the now futile hind-leg. Carlisle, lingering, repressed her desire to laugh.

"Oh!... Well, don't you think you could catch her a new one, perhaps?"

"Bopper he mout ketch her a new one mebbe to-morrow, mom.... *Hiesh*, Rebecca!"

Moved by some impulse in her own buoyant mood, Carlisle touched the littlest girl on the shoulder with a well-gloved finger.

"Here—Rebecca, poor child!... You can buy yourself something better than Junebugs."

The proprietor of the deceased bug, having raised her damp dark face, ceased crying instantly. Over the astounding windfall the chubby fingers closed with a gesture suggesting generations of acquisitiveness.

“Is it hers to keep?” spoke her aged sister, in a scared voice. “That there’s a *dollar*, mom.”

“Hers to keep ...” replied the goddess, smiling.

But her speech stopped there, shorn of a donator’s gracious frills, and the smile became somewhat fixed upon the lovely lip....

There had appeared a man’s face at the glass of the old doors, and the lady, straightening benignantly to sweep on to her triumph upstairs, had run suddenly upon his fixed gaze. Nothing, of course, could have been more natural than this man’s appearance there: who upon earth more suitable for door-keeper to the distinguished visitors than he, who had given his office to the Settlement to-day, in lieu of more expensive gifts? Yet by some flashing trick of Carlisle’s imagination, or of his air of immobility, seen darkly through the glass, it was almost as if he might have, been waiting there for her alone....

Page 2

But the meeting of eyes was over as soon as it began. With so prompt a courtesy did the Dabney House physician swing open the door that it was as if he had been opening it all along, as if she hadn't caught him looking at her....

"How do you do, Miss Heth?... Such a dreadful day!—you were brave to venture out."

"How d'you do?" said Carlisle, in the voice of "manner," a rising voice, modulated, distant and superior. And over her shoulder, she addressed the little Jew girls, with an air of more than perfect ease:

"Well, then, good-bye! Be sure to catch her the new one to-morrow...."

She had seen that the strange young man was smiling. And by that she knew that he remembered their last meeting, and wanted to trade upon her queer weakness at that time, pretending that he and she were pleasant acquaintances together. Presently she should inform him better as to that. But why, oh, why, that small flinching at the sight of him, the very man she had fared into the downpour to explode, not pausing even to mourn her lover's going?...

"I'm a search-party of one," said Dr. Vivian, throwing wider the door, "for Mr. Pond. I wondered if he could have got lost, somewhere down here—he's never turned up yet."

"Mr. Pond?"

"The director of the Settlement, you know, when it opens for business in the fall. He happened to be in Washington, and was good enough to run down to-day to make us a little address."

"Oh."

Carlisle found herself, beyond the door, in a quaint high-ceiled court, enfolded with peristyles in two long rows, and paved with discolored tiles loose under the foot. At the farther end of the court there ran away a broad corridor into the dusk, and here also, full fifty feet distant, rose the grand stairway with ornate sweeping balustrade ending in a tall carved newel-post. Obsolete and ruined and queer the whole placed looked, indeed....

"Luckily," added Dr. Vivian, "I'm in good time to serve as a guide."

But Miss Heth was already walking past him with an expensive rustle, moving straight toward the stairway. For this, needless to say, was not the moment to speak that pointed word or two which should unmask the man; there would be an unavoidable vulgarity about it here, in this solitude. And even if she should get no further opportunity upstairs—well, after all, the situation spoke for itself; nay, thundered. Had not Hugo—-

come to think of it—struck the note of the subtler victory, he who had given magnificently and said nothing? *Noblesse oblige*, as the Gauls say....

“Oh, no, that’s not necessary,” she replied, walking on. “There are the stairs....”

The young man fell in behind her.

“The old house is really quite bewildering, upstairs. It happened that my office was the only place available. Perhaps you will let me show you—”

“Oh, I don’t think I need trouble you, thank you.”

Page 3

“It is no trouble,” said V. Vivian.

Good sentences these, and well pronounced. With them, conversation seemed to languish. The processional pair moved across the shadowy court in entire silence. The benevolent lady led, never so securely entrenched in the victorious order, the beloved of prodigal Hugo Canning, to whom no harm should befall. After her proceeded the slum doctor: the hard marble betrayed the inequality of his footsteps. A minute more and they would be upstairs, swallowed and dispersed in the publicity of the meeting. Floor and ceiling above them brought down the sounds of a company near at hand, the scraping of a chair-leg, the muffled echo of voices. Carlisle’s foot trod upon the bottom step of the broad stairway.

“I wonder if you would give me five minutes after the meeting, Miss Heth?” said the young man’s voice behind her. “There’s a—a matter I’ve wanted very much to speak to you about.”

Cally’s heart seemed to jump a little.

“What is it that you want to speak to me about?” she asked coolly, not turning. And, to her own surprise, she brought her other foot up on the stair.

“Well, it concerns the Works,” said Vivian.

And he added at once, hastily: “Oh, nothing that you need object to at all, I hope. Not at all....”

She had stopped short at the fighting-word, and turned, pink-cheeked. Certes, there was a point at which *noblesse oblige* becomes mere flabby spinelessness.

And upstairs Mrs. Heth, complacent right up at the front, craned round her neck, and thought that Cally was very long in coming....

“Yes? What about the Works?” said Cally, her breath quickening.

“Oh, I don’t mean to detain you now, of course—”

“But now that you have detained me?” she pursued, with no great polish of courtesy.

The young man raised a hand and pushed back his hair, which was short but wavy. It was observed that he wore, doubtless in memory of his uncle, a mourning tie of grosgrain silk, replacing the piquant aquarium scene.

“I could hardly explain it all in just a few sentences,” said he, affecting reluctance, “and I —certainly don’t want to give you a wrong impression.... To begin quite at the end, I’ve

been wondering if I—I might be allowed to make one or two small improvements there, at the Works, I mean,—in fact, out of a—a sort of fund I have."

Carlisle stared at him spellbound. She stood on the bottom step of the old grand stairway, one gloved hand on the balustrade; and, as she so stood, her eyes just came on a level with those of the tall doctor. His hare-brained audacity almost took her breath away.

"Oh," said she. "Out of a fund you have."

And she thought wildly of accepting his offer at once, compelling him to name a definite sum, just for the fun of seeing how he would wriggle out of it afterwards.

Page 4

“I’m tremendously interested in the Works, you know,” the man rushed on, quite as if he found encouragement in her reply, “because I have so many friends who work there. It’s to gratify my peace of mind, just to know that they have—everything they need. As I say, I happen to—to have a sort of fund—a little public fund, you might say—for—for purposes of the kind. And the idea of outside cooeperation in such a matter is a perfectly sound one, as you doubtless know, a—a sound, advanced socialistic idea. It’s simply the community acknowledging some responsibility where it already claims the right to regulate ...”

At this point her stare seemed to penetrate him with a doubt, and he said, with the air of having skipped hastily and turned back:

“I mustn’t detain you now to give the full argument, of course, but I assure you the idea is sound and—mutually beneficial, as I believe. Unfortunately,” he added, with a certain embarrassment, “I don’t know your father.”

“Tell me,” said Carlisle, feeling an excitement mounting within her, “how is it that you are always thinking up these plans for doing good to other people?”

Before Dr. Vivian could meet this poser, the front door opened with a bang, and a youngish man in a wet yellow raincoat came striding rapidly across the court toward them. He was a powerfully built man with a blue-tinged chin, and wore the air of a person of authority.

“Meeting not begun yet?” he demanded, without salutation, apparently addressing Carlisle. “Thought I was late.”

“Ah, Mr. Pond—glad to see you,” said Vivian, stepping forward a little to meet the newcomer. “They’ve just begun—you’ll find an ovation waiting for you.”

“In your office? Aren’t you going up, to lead the applause?”

The doctor bowed gravely. “In my office. I’ll join you directly.”

“I see,” said the man, nodding, having never checked his stride.

But all that he had seemed to see with his keen black eyes was the lovely girl posed on the last step of the ornamental stairway. He almost brushed against her as he strode by.

The Pond person’s footsteps diminished up the long stairs. A moment later a volley of hand-clapping, sounding very near, indicated his arrival in the meeting-room. But his interruption and his irritating stare had accomplished no mollifying purpose down in the court. But one end, indeed, could justify the proud Miss Heth in lingering in a public hall with the slanderer of herself and her family.

“Doesn’t it occur to you,” she said, hardly waiting for the intruder to get out of earshot, “that so much preaching about other people’s business seems rather—odd, coming from you?”

Dr. Vivian now affected to look troubled.

“There was just that difficulty,” said he, slowly, “that you might think I was preaching. I’m not, this time, really—”

“Don’t you know perfectly well you only said that in a—a horrid way to try to make me feel uncomfortable?”

Page 5

She paused for a reply; her excitement was growing. Her figure was enveloped in a slim raincoat of fine gray; she wore a yellow straw hat of an intriguing shape, and over it a white veil closely drawn to keep the wet wind from her face. Now and then, as her eyes moved, a descending black-and-gold eyelash became entangled with this veil; that occurrence, in fact, took place at this precise moment, creating an emergency situation of some consequence. It was a matter of considerable public interest to see how it would all work out. However, the girl merely raised an indifferent hand, and plucked the veil out a little. The man V.V. looked hurriedly away.

He was saying: "I assure you I meant nothing of the kind. However, doubtless it's natural that you should think so—"

"It seems *very* natural to me—especially here in the new Settlement building!... What about the *parable of the rich young man now*?"

He stood looking at her without a reply; one of his quaint looks, it was.

However, Carlisle knew positively that he did not want to improve the Works out of any fund he pretended to have, and was resolved to show him no mercy now. She had really meant to spare him, and he, mistaking magnanimity for weakness, had said what he had said. On his head be it: his deceptive trusting look should not save him now.

"Why don't you say something?" she demanded.

The young man gave an embarrassed laugh.

"Well, to tell the honest truth, I don't seem to think of anything to say—"

"Oh!... So the Settlement suggests *nothing* to you—as to picking the beam from your own eye?"

"Not at this moment, I think. In fact, I don't seem to grasp at all—"

"*Oh!*" said Cally, with a little gasp.

And then, stung on by his reckless hardihood, she struck to kill:

"How can you *look* at me, and pretend that you're so anxious to help other people's businesses, when you know you wouldn't even give to your own Settlement—*not a cent*!"

The two stood facing each other, hardly a yard apart, their eyes dead-level. V.V., as Henrietta Cooney called him, continued to look at her, and though he was far from a florid young man, it seemed now as if he must have been so, so much color did he have to lose. And Cally discovered that the man had somehow managed to keep, over all

these brilliant weeks, that mysterious trick he had of making her feel unfair, and even rather horrid and common, when she knew perfectly well she wasn't. For the look on his unreliable face was that of one stabbed from behind in a company where he had trusted, and his eyes seemed to be saying to her quite distinctly: "Don't you worry about *me!* Just give me a minute or two, and *I'll* be all right...."

But all that his actual voice said, in rather a remote way, was:

"What a terrific hypocrite you must think me!... I hadn't realized ..."

Page 6

It was precisely the point that Carlisle Heth had been trying to establish, for a long, long time. Yet now, in the moment of triumph, her gaze suddenly wavered from his; and she heard herself, to her own secret confusion, saying hurriedly and weakly:

“At least, I understood—some one *told* me—you hadn’t.... Of course you—you *might* have given something, and—this person not have known....”

But Jack Dalhousie’s friend only answered, in the same detached way:

“It’s unpardonable, my detaining you this way. I’d no idea ... May I show you the way up—”

“No—*no!* Please wait!...”

He waited, silent. Carlisle, having paused long enough to take firm hold of her consciousness of vast superiorities, resumed more strongly:

“Perhaps I ought to explain why I—thought that. I was told that the whole thing had fallen through, when a—a wealthy subscriber stepped in and secretly gave a very large amount—had bought the building for you. So I—I naturally thought—”

“It was absolutely natural. In fact, it’s quite true.... Shall we go to the meeting now?”

But no, something in her required that he must state in plain words the fact that would justify her accusation, alleged by his eyes to be so unjust: namely, that it was (practically) a member of her family who had done this splendid thing for him. Yet she went rather further than she had intended when she said, glancing away over the queer dusky court:

“I will tell you. Some one gave us to understand—not he himself, of course,—that it was a friend of ours who had done this ... Mr. Hugo Canning.”

He made no answer.

An uncontrollable desire carried the girl yet further. She said, in a weakening voice:

“*Was it?*”

In saying this, she brought her eyes back fully to her victim. And if ever guilt was written large upon a human countenance, it was upon the face of V. Vivian at that moment. Brightly flushed he was, with an embarrassment painful to witness. And yet, so strange is the way of life, the joy of victory once again seemed to slip from the clutch of Cally Heth. What house of cards was this she had pulled down upon herself?...

“Really, you must appreciate,” the man was saying, in a light, dry voice, “I shouldn’t feel at liberty to betray a secret of that sort, even if I knew. I’m sorry, but—”

But the girl’s sickening sensations of falling through space broke out in faltering speech:

“*Oh!*... Do you *mean* ...” She halted, to steady herself, and took a fresh start, no better than the first: “Do you mean—that—”

“I mean only, Miss Heth, that I haven’t the slightest idea what this is all about. I thought,” he said, in a voice of increasing hardness, “that we were talking of the Works. If, at another time, you can give me a few minutes—”

Page 7

“Was it YOU?” said Carlisle, breaking through his defenses ... “Do you mean—it was YOU, all along?...”

“I mean nothing of any sort. Does it occur to you that these questions are quite unfair? —that they put me in a ...”

She demanded in a small voice: “*Did you buy this house for the Settlement?*”

Shot down with the pointblank question, the tall young man, whose coat was so extremely polished at the elbows, died game, saying with sudden gentleness:

“No, it was my Uncle Armistead.”

And then there was no sound but the steady beat of the rain upon sidewalk and roofs ...

Upstairs, just a floor and a ceiling away, Mrs. Heth, craning her neck for the last time, perceived that Cally had decided not to come to the meeting; also that it was just as well, viewing the inclement weather. Downstairs, almost directly beneath her, Cally stood front to front with the family enemy, her face quite white.

“Of course you understand,” the enemy was saying, hurriedly and yet firmly too, “he gave me the money expecting it to be used for the public good. I’ve considered that I merely had it in trust, as a fund for—for these purposes, as I’ve explained. And this—-well, you may easily imagine that it was the most perfect form of self-indulgence.... I’ve gotten so fond of this old place ... But I can’t imagine how we came to be talking of it, and I beg that you’ll forget the whole matter. I—my uncle would have been very much annoyed to—to have it known or talked about....”

Not in that singular experience in the Cooney parlor, not even in the memorable New Year’s moment in her own library, had Carlisle been swept with such a desire to dissociate herself from her own person, to sneak away from herself, to drop through the floor. Nevertheless, some dignity in her, standing fast, struck out for salvage; and out of the uprush of humiliating sensation, she heard her voice, colorless and flat:

“I’m sorry I said that. You make me ... quite ashamed....”

The flush deepened abruptly on the tall doctor’s cheek.

“*Don’t* say that! Don’t you suppose I understand how absolutely natural it was?... Everybody’d have thought just the same, in your place....”

Carlisle had turned away from his translucent eye, finding it unbearable; she descended from the stair, took an irresolute step or two over the ruined floor of the once stately court. And then she halted, having really nowhere to go, staring fixedly toward the distant doors....

Mamma's nearness could not help her now. Hugo's fortifying love was no buffer against this extraordinary moment. All alone Cally stood with the contemned religious fellow who had unhorsed and disarmed her once again, and now there would be no more weapons. And there was a worse thing here than her mean looking for hypocrisy, and the discovery, instead, of a mad generosity, a princely folly. Bad enough all that seemed; very bad indeed: but Cally's painful moment seemed to cut deeper yet.

Page 8

After all the struggling, had it come to this? Was the author of the Beach opinion of her a man whom she must greatly admire?...

Behind her stood the stairway, which led on up to mamma and the embracing security of the victorious order. Behind her also stood the man, the royal giver of the granary where finer-feathered birds now made merry among the spoils. With what speech should Cally Heth, mocked and jeered by her feeble “I’m sorry,” turn now and pass him?...

She heard the sound of his unequal footstep, and then his voice behind her, stirred with a sudden feeling:

“Why, it’s not a thing to be sorry about—how could you possibly have thought otherwise?... Don’t you suppose I realize what cause I’ve given you to—to distrust and dislike me? You’d be more than human if you could forgive and forget—what I said to you one night. How could you, when it was so unforgivable? And since then—”

“*Don’t!*” Carlisle said, in a muffled sort of voice. And then, clearly and distinctly: “Don’t!... I can’t quite stand that!”

She turned on the old floor, with the sound of her own strengthening voice, and came again face to face with the man, V.V. There had seemed to come to her a light. And back into her smooth young cheek trickled that color so loved by her betrothed, who had not bought the Settlement House after all....

She was a brilliantly successful girl, the chosen wife of the most shiningly eligible of men; and he was a lame slum doctor in a worn-out suit, beneath her notice as a man altogether. And yet, as Hugo stood above her in all those material aspects which had always summed up her whole demand of life, so this man stood above her in some more subtle and mysterious way. And it had always been so: by bright swift flickers of intuition she had seemed suddenly to see that now. All the restlessness and discontent which the thought and sight of him had power to awake in her from the beginning came from just this; and she had never been able to put him down, no matter how she had chafed and denounced, because the final fact had always been that he, in his queer way, stood above her ...

And now, in this unsteadied moment, with all hope of bringing him down beaten finally to death, there had seemed to rise and beckon a finer way of bridging this gap between them. All that was best in the girl suddenly rose, demanding for once to be allowed to meet the shabby alien on his own reckless level.

“Look here,” said Cally, with a kind of tremulous eagerness, “I want to tell you something....”

Yes, surely it was all a matter between herself and him: she could meet his eyes now with no sense that did not add to her curious inner exaltation. Had not these eyes said to her from the beginning that they would give her no peace till she came to this?...

“You were right to say what you did that night. A puff of wind blew the boat over after he got out. Mr. Dalhousie never knew I was upset.”

Page 9

The words dropped unafraid into a perfect silence. The girl's manner was as simple, as undramatic, as possible. Yet, considering who these two were, considering the intentions with which she had entered his Dabney House not ten minutes before, no more startling words could have been devised by the wit of man.

"He never knew," repeated Vivian, in a voice suddenly mechanical.

No doubt it was by his good fortune alone that he had avoided any alarming change of expression, as he listened to the announcement which seemed to shake and stagger his visible world. The girl was soaring upon her unimagined moment of spiritual adventure. But V. Vivian stood like a man turned to stone, gazing blind into a void....

Presently, out of the general chaos the young man's dazed mind stirred; leapt to life. Thought shook him through like waves of pain. It came upon him first, with crushing force, that this sweet-voiced girl with a face like all the angels had after all coldly lied, murderously lied, and maintained her lie through many months. Hard upon that, blotting it out, there swept the juster knowledge that, no matter what she had done, truth had triumphed at last; what was good in her had overcome her poor weakness. Lastly, he thought of Jack Dalhousie who, from the clouds, had received his release from prison. Yes, old Dal could come home now....

"He never knew," said V.V., in his curious voice. "I'm so glad ... This clears him ... I never understood how he could have ... I'm so glad to—have it settled...."

If he was so glad, his face libelled him past forgiveness. But Cally Heth still soared, too high in the unplumbed blue to note, even now, what house was this she had destroyed.

"I really didn't realize at all at the time," she said, with the same simplicity. "It all happened so quickly, and it was so bewildering, and I didn't have time to think. The story about him just seemed to spring up of itself, and then it grew and grew all the time. I've worried a great deal about it, all along...."

A kind of passion came into the man's face, and he said:

"Thank God, there's still time to make it all right."

Then his look brought her down a little.... "To make it all right?"

Vivian gazed down. He thought of what lay ahead for her now; and his heart seemed to turn within him.... However, sympathy was not desired of him: his lot was but to strengthen the hands of the brave.

"Miss Heth—indeed, I could envy you all the happiness you are going to give. Think—-just think what it means ... I know you must be eager—to begin, to—"

“To begin?” she echoed again, feeling somehow that their privacy was being invaded. “Why—what do you mean?... I don’t understand.”

“I jump ahead too fast, of course. But—you must be so anxious ... to have it all off your mind, and not think of it any more. I know you must be impatient to get word to Dal at the first possible moment—it means so much to him. More than meat and drink.... And then there’s his poor old father ...”

Page 10

Cally stared at him, speechless. There was no exaltation now; no more soaring. Rooted in her tracks she stood, yet seemed to herself to shrink and recoil from him, in her sudden self-horror. What, oh what, had she done?

And by chance at this very moment—doubtless through some Settlementer's opening a door for air—there came floating down to her the distinct voice of her mother, the strong voice of authority and no nonsense, the voice of Wealth and Permanence, of the victorious knowledge that God thinks twice before he condemns a person of quality.... "*In accepting the Chairmanship of the Finance Committee, I desire to say* ..."

Cally raised a gloved little hand to her veiled lips. Plainer than speech her frightened eyes said: *Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?*

"You—you've misunderstood. No ... no! I didn't mean that at all."

"Oh!... Do you mean—you don't wish to see Colonel Dalhousie—personally? Of course not!... It wouldn't be necessary in the least. Perhaps you would let me.... And as to a telegram to Dal—"

"*No—no!*... You mustn't go to see him. You mustn't send a telegram. I can't allow that—you've misunderstood entirely. *You mustn't tell anybody*...."

They stared at each other with the same colorless faces, and again the rain became audible. In the man's too-confiding eyes, hope died hard.

"Not tell anybody? Why, I don't see ... There's no other way of making it right, I'm afraid.... And you have told me—"

"But I didn't tell you to tell anybody else. I didn't. I only meant to tell *you*, don't you see?..."

This subtlety was past the vision of the donator of the Dabney House. North, south, east, or west, he could see nothing but a seraph-faced girl whose misery it was to feel the penitential pangs, yet not be able quite to rise to the fulness of reparation. That she had reached for that fulness was to him the one thing certain in all the world. What want of delicacy in him had caused her to falter and look backward?...

Into the lucid gray of his eyes had come that look which more than once before Carlisle Heth had found intolerable. Little she recked for it now. Was not this the heart of her present dilemma, that she had already followed his ocular incitements too fatally far? By what religious prestidigitation he had trapped her secret from her must remain a thick mystery now. Nothing mattered but that he, having deceitfully seemed to agree that it was all a matter between herself and him, should not now turn and betray her.... *Tell now?* The sudden vista of scandal horrified her. How would she ever face mamma again? How would Hugo, whose bride and pride she was, regard her then?...

“Don’t you see?” she said, with gathering tensity—“I—I meant it as *a confidence to you*. You mustn’t dream of telling anybody else....”

Page 11

“But neither you nor I own the truth. This belongs to Dalhousie....”

“Oh, it doesn’t!—it doesn’t! How can you! You misunderstand!—What I said to you gave you a totally wrong impression. He was entirely to blame for my upsetting. *Entirely!* He behaved abominably—and I—”

“*Tell now!”* cried the man, with his strange stern passion. “Once it’s done, you’ll always be glad. Don’t you know you *must*, now! Don’t you see you can’t be happy, till you let the truth be known?...”

There came from above the unmistakable movement of chairs, the sound of many feet. It appeared that the Settlement meeting was breaking up. The man’s entreaties bounded back dead.

“I couldn’t!—Don’t you understand? There’s nothing to tell. It was not my fault. The story was distorted, distorted, and distorted! I regretted that as much as any one. But I could do nothing, nothing to stop it. And don’t you understand I couldn’t possibly tell this broadcast *now*, when it’s been done with for *months!* What would people think of me? Don’t you—”

“What will you have to think of yourself if you don’t tell?”

But the hard shot missed fire, the reason being that what she thought of herself did not matter in the least just now. She was mamma’s daughter, Hugo Canning’s betrothed, fighting for her own: and now that movement upstairs warned her that she had no moment to lose.

Carlisle seized the slum doctor’s arm with a resolute little hand. Her voice, though panicky, was as inexorable as mamma’s own.

“Promise me,” said she, “that you will never repeat to anybody what I told you in confidence.”

The face of the young man, which was usually so harmless-looking, had suddenly become quite stern. He looked as if he might ask God to pity her again, given a very little more. When he spoke, he spoke brusquely:

“What you ask is a conspiracy of silence. I cannot make such a promise. I cannot.”

“Oh, how *can* you be so hard! You’ve never meant anything but trouble to me since the first minute I saw you! It isn’t fair, don’t you see it isn’t? This has happened so suddenly—I *must* have time to think. Promise that you won’t say anything—at least till you hear from me again....”

Silence. And then V. Vivian said, in a suddenly hopeless voice:

“I will agree to say nothing without first seeing you....”

Cally Heth dropped his arm instantly, turned from him. She fled, not up the grand stairway, but over the court for the doors, with the protecting arms of the House of Heth beyond. And none of her other routs from the family enemy had been quite like this one.

XVIII

Page 12

Night-Thoughts on the Hardness of Religious Fellows, compelling you to be Hard, too; Happier Things again, such as Hugo, Europe, Trousseaux, *etc*.; concluding with a Letter from Texas and a Little Vulgarian in a Red Hat.

The tireless William retraced the wet streets to the Dabney House in ample time for Mrs. Heth, but the Chairman of the Finance Committee, being in agreeable converse with fellow philanthropists, came home in Mrs. Byrd's car instead, after all. Accordingly she did not say to William, "Miss Carlisle decided not to come, Banks?"—which she liked to call William for the English sound of it—and Banks, or William, did not look respectfully surprised and say, "Yas'm, she came ..."

Arriving at home, the good little lady presently ascended to the third floor, where she entered her daughter's room without knocking, according to her wont. However, Carlisle had been ready for her for some time.

"You stayed," was mamma's arch conjecture, "to write a ream to Hugo, dear fellow, I suppose?..."

"No, I went!" said Cally, now in the last stages of an evening toilette. "Only when I got there, and peeped in, it all looked so dreary and hopeless that my heart failed me, and I turned right around and came back! Was it—"

"You did! How long were you there? There's a little too much powder on your nose, my dear—there! Did you come upstairs?"

"Oh, no! I just slipped in for a moment or two and glanced about that queer old court downstairs. Quaint and interesting, isn't it? How was the meeting?"

"Most interesting and gratifying," said mamma, sinking into a rose-lined chair. "We begin a noble work. You may go now, Flora. I am made a governor, as well as chairman of the most important committee...."

She monologized for some time, in a rich vein of reminiscence and autobiography, revealing among other things that she had rather broadly hinted, to Mrs. Byrd and others, who was the anonymous donor of the Settlement House; a certain wealthy New Yorker, to wit. However, it was clear that she saw nothing amiss, nor did she say anything more germane to her daughter's inner drama than, in the moment of parting:

"Rub your cheeks a little with the soft cloth. You look quite pale."

Carlisle rubbed faithfully, aware of a lump of lead where her heart should have been. Later she went downstairs, and then on for dinner at the McVeys'. Most grateful she was for this mental distraction; to-night she would have played three-hand bridge with papa and Mattie Allen with enthusiasm.

Page 13

Evey's dinner, of course, was far ahead of three-hand. The McVeys were very rich, far richer than the Heths (theirs had been the marriage of McVey's Drygoods and Notions, Wholesale Only, and Herkimer's Fresh Provisions), and were considered "not quite" by some people, though Evey certainly went everywhere and was very refined. Accordingly, the evening's viands were of the best and the table talk at least good enough for all practical purposes. Carlisle, who was almost feverishly animated, lingered till the last possible moment: Evey actually asked her to spend the night, and she actually came very near doing it. Escorted home in a maritime hackney-coach by young Mr. Robert Tellford (whose heart had been lacerated by rumors that persistently reached him), Canning's betrothed permitted Robert to linger in the library, positively detained him in the library, till eleven-thirty o'clock: courtesies which would have run like wine to the young Tellford head but for the lady's erratic and increasing distraitness....

The bibulous metaphor is here reversible. It possessed mutuality, so to say. Cally herself would drown trouble to-night with intoxicating draughts of human society. But there came a time when this resource was denied her; when the human bars closed, as it were; in short, when all the society in reach must sorrowfully put on his tall hat and go. And then there came the nocturnal stillness of the house, and then the solitariness of the bedchamber, and after that the dark.

Now the question that had rumbled all evening cloud-like in the background of her consciousness, swam and took shape in the midnight shadows, dangling before the eye of her mind in gigantic and minatory capitals:

WOULD HE TELL?

To this stark inquiry all the girl's problem came down. Gone like a fever-mist was the emotional flare-up (as mamma would have said) which had tricked her into blurting out a secret scarcely even formulated before in her own inmost soul. That mysterious moment remained merely as an astonishment. It was the strangest thing that had ever happened to her; she had simply been swept away by some unfathomable madness. And at present Nature's first law was working in her with obliterating force. *Would the man tell?* Here in the sane and ordered surroundings, with mamma sleeping and satisfied one floor below, and a long, long letter to be written to her knight among men the first thing to-morrow, there was nothing in the world that mattered but that. If Vivian would not tell, then, indeed, all was well with her. If he did tell ...

He had said that he would not tell without first seeing her. But of course there was nothing under heaven to prevent his seeing her, or sending word to her, at any time, by day or by night. And then what?

Carlisle lay upon her back, rather small and frightened in the tall bed, struggling to pluck away the veil from the face of the menacing future. What would “telling” mean, exactly?...

Page 14

There was a hopeful view. The whole thing was so confused, just as he himself had admitted, more than once. It might all be put on the ground of a mistake, a little misunderstanding, recently discovered. You could tell, and not go into all the mixed-up details. Jack Dalhousie would then gratefully return from Texas (where he was really getting on much better than he had ever done at home—Dr. Vivian had practically said so); his father would quietly take him back; and it would be generally understood that Jack was not a coward now, and was greatly improved morally by the disciplinary exile, and everything would be all right. But of course the difficulty here was that somebody (like Colonel Dalhousie, for instance) might think to ask why the discovery of the little misunderstanding came now, instead of six months ago. You could hardly reply to such an one that you had just discovered the mistake as the result of a flare-up, caused by a slum doctor's giving twenty-five thousand dollars to buy an old hotel. Who would understand that, when you didn't yourself?...

Carlisle, indeed, being a practical girl, did not linger long on the optimistic prospect. For to-night at least, "telling" seemed a matter too dreadful to contemplate. Colonel Dalhousie was an irascible and solitary widower with one son whom he had once been proud of; and this son, having been strangely compelled to take a lady's word as to his own conduct, had been disgraced by that word, cast out with his father's curse upon his forehead. Was it likely that these two would take the discovery of a little misunderstanding now with a charming quiet courtesy?—that, shouting the discovery abroad to save their faces, they would have due regard for careful qualifications and for striking the right note? The reply was the negative: it was not at all likely.

Cally knew the world's rough judgments, where all is black or all is white, and ifs and buts go overboard as spoiling the strong color scheme. And well she knew the way of horrid gossip; none better. That she, Carlisle Heth, had deliberately lied merely to save her name from public association with young Dalhousie's, and by this lie had ruined a boy who in his way had loved her well: such would be the story which the angry Colonel (perhaps coming to shoot papa besides) would throw to the four winds, to be rolled in the mouth of gossip forevermore. O what a tasty morsel was here, my countrymen!...

Staring fearfully into the dusk, Carlisle pictured herself as hearing such a story about Evey or Mattie: she perceived at once, with sickening sensations, how intensely she would be interested in it. Yes; once started, it would sweep through drawing-rooms and clubs like fire. With what glee would the world's coarse tongue make its reprisals upon brilliant success! Town-talk the lovely Miss Heth would be, spotted all over with that horrid tattle from which she (and Hugo) had ever so shuddered and shrunk....

Page 15

And against this threatened avalanche, entailing who knew what consequences, she had but the frail shield of the sense of honor—well, then, say, the sense of chivalry—of a man far beneath her world, whom she had frequently told herself that she disliked and despised.

A pale yellow ray of the moon, journeying upward over the coverlet, fell across her face. She rose, pattered on slim bare feet over the chequered floor, lowered the shade. Inside and out, all the world was still. Cally dropped down on her chaise-longue by the window, very wide awake.... And, gradually, since she was practical, she formed a plan of action: a plan so simple that she wondered she had not thought of it at once....

A long time she had spent in trying to think how she might compel, cajole, or bribe the man at the Dabney House to pledge her his eternal silence. But she had not been able to think of any promising way: each time, she brought up confronting with painful fascination the conviction that religious fellows were hard. And out of this conviction there grew, in time, her own resolve. Well, then, she would be hard, too. She would avoid seeing or having any communication with Dr. Vivian, and if he dared to repeat *anything*, she would simply laugh it all aside. She would deny that she ever said any such preposterous thing in her life. She would *have* to do that; her duty to others demanded it.... And what could he do then? It would merely be his word against hers, Miss Heth's. He would be left in a most unpleasant position....

In this position V. Vivian remained while Carlisle slept. However, the new day, as it pleasantly proved, brought no need for such severe measures. Many rings at doorbell and telephone Cally's strained ears heard between getting up and bedtime, but the hard ring of Nemesis was never among them. All day silence brooded unbroken in the direction of the Dabney House. And when another morning wore to evening, and no heart brake, and yet another and another, there descended again upon the girl the peaceful sense of re-won security....

In these days the House of Heth was in a continual bustle. On Tuesday next—a week to a day from the Settlement meeting—the ladies were to depart for New York, Hugo, and Europe, the Trousseau and the Announcement, to return no more till mid-September. On the same day the titular master of the house was to go off for a five days' fishing junket, thence flying to New York for the "seeing off," and soon thereafter starting out for a three weeks' business trip to the Far West. Along with the various domestic problems raised by this programme, there were all the routine duties of the season to be attended to. Cold-weather things must still be salted down with camphor balls and packed away; costly pictures provided with muslin wrappers; drawing-room furniture with linen slip-covers; rooms cleaned and locked up, doors and windows screened and awninged. Mrs. Heth went dashing from one bit of generalship to another, and telephoned ten thousand times a day. Nevertheless she kept eyes in her head, and accordingly she observed to Mr. Heth one starlit night, as they sat *a deux* on

the little front balcony where flowering window-boxes so refinedly concealed one from the public view:

Page 16

“I never saw a girl so absolutely naive about showing her feelings. She began to droop the minute he left the house, and hasn’t been her natural self since.... Irritable!—till you can’t say good morning without her snapping your head off.”

“Maybe, it’s the weather,” suggested Mr. Heth, who wore a white flannel suit and fanned himself with a dried palm-leaf. “And I reckon, too, she’s feeling sorry to leave her old father for such a long time. Four months—hio!”

“Cally’s not the girl to get black rings under her eyes for things like that.”

She added presently: “It’s a pure love-match, which is naturally a gratification to me, who brought the whole thing about. ’Thank God, Cally, you’ve got a mother,’ I said to her only the other day. But I do say there’s such a thing as carrying love just a little too far.”

Cally, meantime, while affecting no interest in summer clothes for chairs, kept as closely occupied with her own affairs, social activities and preparations for the brilliant absence, as mamma did with hers. Much time went, too, to her correspondence with Canning, who wrote her daily fat delightful letters, all breathing ardent anticipation of her approaching visit in his own city. And back to Canning, she wrote even fatter letters every morning in mamma’s sitting-room, dear letters (he thought them) in which she told him every single thing except what she was really thinking about....

And why shouldn’t she tell Hugo that also? Once or twice she really came very near doing it. For as her mind had become released from her first acute apprehensions, it had seemed to insist on turning inward a little; and there grew within her a sense of unhappiness, of loneliness, a feeling of her poor little self against the world. She longed for some one to explain it all to, to justify herself before; and who more appropriate in this connection than her lover? That Hugo might have been shocked, and perhaps disgusted, to have the misunderstanding discovered to him by way of the Dalhousies’ megaphone was, indeed, likely; but to have her quietly tell it to him, as it really happened, with the proper stress on circumstances and gossip, would be quite another matter. She felt almost certain that he would agree with her; it once that it would be a great mistake to rake up all this now, when it had all blown over and Dalhousie was doing so splendidly down in Texas....

However, Cally procrastinated. And then, Sunday morning in church, as she sat pensively wishing for a confidant, it came upon her somewhat startlingly that she already had one: Dr. Vivian was her confidant. Did he not know more about her than anybody else in the world?...

Page 17

The simple thought seemed to cure her instantly of her wish. She had tried having a confidant and it had brought her to this; henceforward let her keep her own counsel. (So she mused, walking homeward in the brilliant sunshine and light airs with J. Forsythe Avery, who had just conquered his pique over his rejection last January.) That her one confidant's honorable silence expressed his trust that she herself would "tell" was possibly true; but that, in this no-quarter conflict between them, was merely so much the worse for him. She would not think of him at all. She had run away from him every time she had seen him; now she had but to do it once more, and all would be as if it had never been....

At the Sabbath dinner-table, which was to-day uninvaded by guests, the Heths' talk was animated. The imminent separation brought a certain softness into the family atmosphere; papa basked in it. He had spent his Sunday morning playing sixteen holes of golf at the Country Club, and would have easily made the full round but for slicing three new balls into the pond on the annoying seventeenth drive. This had provoked him into smashing his driver, as he had a score of only eighty-eight at that point, which was well below his personal bogey. Even mamma affected interest in her spouse's explanations of how it all happened.

"Of course the caddy simply slipped the balls in his pockets the minute your back was turned—they're all thieves, the little ragamuffins," said she. "And, by the way, I haven't telephoned the bank about the silver."

Encouraged by his ladies' consideration, Mr. Heth proposed a little afternoon jaunt with Cally.

"It's too pretty a day to stay in," said he. "Let's take the car, eh, and run down and look at that new cantilever bridge at Apsworth?"

"Oh, papa!" said Cally, regretfully. "I promised Mr. Avery I'd take a walk with him. He looked so fat and forlorn I didn't have the heart to refuse. I'm so sorry."

Mr. Heth started to quote something about your daughter's being your daughter, but when Cally added, "You know I'd lots rather go with you, papa," he changed his mind, and went off to his nap instead.

Mamma similarly departed. Cally, not feeling nappy, sat in the library and wrote to her lover the last letter but one she would write before seeing him in New York. Her eager pen flew: but so did the minutes also, or did the impetuous Avery anticipate the moment of his engagement? His tender ring broke unexpectedly across her betrothal thoughts, and Cally returned to earth with a start ... Good *heavens!* Four o'clock already!—and she with twenty minutes' getting ready to do!

She caught up the pages of the unfinished letter, and skipped for the stairs. In the hall there was unbroken quiet, with no sound of a servant coming. Cally paused, listening, and then remembered that it was Sunday afternoon, when even the best Africans are so very likely to have “just stepped out.” Why wait? The girl went and opened the door herself, a smile of greeting in her eye, a lively apology for her obvious unreadiness upon her lip.

Page 18

However, it was not, after all, the amorous Mr. Avery who confronted her. The vestibule held only an ill-dressed young girl, in a gaudy red hat, the sort of looking person who should at most have rung the basement bell, if that: and she herself seemed to realize this by the guilty little start and tremble she gave when the stately door swung open upon her. The young mistress of the house eyed her doubtfully.

“Good afternoon.”

“G-good evenin’, ma’am!...”

As she seemed at a loss how to proceed, Carlisle said: “Yes? What is it?”

The young person raised a bare hand and brushed it, with a strange gesture, before her eyes.

“Dr. Vivian he told me to give you this note, ma’am.”

She added, as if suddenly moved to destroy a possible impression of Dr. Vivian as a slave-driver, flinging orders this way and that:

“He’d of brung it himself, on’y I was going walkin’ myself, ma’am, and asked him to leave me take it.”

If the fall was from the height of the securest moment Carlisle had known since her self-betrayal, the more stunning was the impact. Her heart appeared to abdicate its duties, with one kick; all her being drew together in a knot within her. It had come, after all. To run away was well, but she had not run soon enough....

She received the note mechanically, saying: “Very well.”

“Would you wish me to wait for a nanser, ma’am? Doctor he didn’t say ...”

In heaven or earth, what answer would she find to this?

“No, you needn’t wait.”

“Do you feel faint, ma’am?”

“Faint?... No, why should I?”

The young person, convicted of impertinence and silliness besides, turned red, but would not remove her gaze from the lady’s face.

“The—the heat we been havin’, ma’am. I don’t know—it’s so sickenin’, kind of. I—I fainted last week, twice, ma’am.”

Something nameless in the little creature's wide-eyed gaze, timid and yet thrilled, arrested Carlisle in the act of shutting the door upon her. Was it possible that this singular messenger of Fate had knowledge of the message she brought?

"Why do you stare at me so?"

The girl replied with simplicity:

"I can't help it, ma'am, you look so sweet."

Carlisle leaned against the polished edge of the glass and oak door. The same chill little hand clenched the unfinished pages to Hugo, and Vivian's only too fatally finished note. She perceived who this girl must be, and even in this moment her thought was riveted by the wild suspicion that her secret had already been betrayed.

"You live at the Dabney House, I suppose?—you're a buncher at the Works?... How did you know me—that this note was for me?"

Here was a puzzler, indeed. By what instinct had little Kern known, the instant the door began to open, that this, and no other, was Mr. V.V.'s beautiful lady?...

Page 19

“How could you be anybody else, ma’am?... You couldn’t.”

“I believe I have heard Dr. Vivian speak of you. Possibly,” she said, with stony bitterness, “you have heard of me in the same way?”

The girl seemed to shrink a little at her tone. “Oh, ma’am—no! To *me*! No, ma’am! He *wouldn’t* ...”

“But he is a great friend of yours?”

Kern raised a hand to her heart, understanding only too much that was not so. It was a glorious moment for her, and a terrible one.

“No, ma’am,” said she, shaking her head a number of times. “I’m only his charity sick.”

She added, as if to make the repudiation complete: “Mr. V.V.’s friends are ladies, ma’am.”

“Mr. V.V.?”

Confronted by her damning slip, the young person turned scarlet, but she stood her ground with a little gasp.

“A nickname, ma’am, that *all* his sick call him by....”

A fair enough rally, no doubt, but on the whole it accomplished nothing. Just in the middle of it, the lady had shut the door in the small vulgarian’s face.

Carlisle clutched the two letters to her breast. The door having been shut, she was alone in the world. She went up two flights in the Sunday afternoon stillness, and locked herself in her room. Mamma should not enter here on her gliding heels.

So this, after all, was what he meant by “seeing.” Having decoyed her with false hopes for five days, he struck from ambush, giving her no chance to speak for herself. Well, she would be hard, too. She would make no answer, and when he spoke, she would deny ...

That the worst had now come to the worst, she had not entertained a doubt. Accordingly the emotional revulsion was strong when, breaking open the envelope with cold fingers, Carlisle found that the letter within was in a different handwriting from the superscription. It was not from Dr. Vivian at all.

However, her instant uprush of relief was somewhat mitigated when she saw—as she did in the first glance, for this hand had been not unfamiliar to her once—that the letter Vivian enclosed to her was from Jack Dalhousie.

Standing rigid by the window, she read with parted lips:

WEYMOUTH, May 14th.

DEAR V.V.:

I'd have answered your letter earlier only I haven't had any heart for writing letters. Fate has knocked me out again. God knows I've tried, and cut out the drink, and worked hard, and suffered agonies of the damned, but it doesn't do any good. The world isn't big enough for people like me to hide in, and the only thing I can't understand is why people like me are ever born. What's the use of it all, V.V., I can't see to save my life. The trouble all came from a fellow named Bellows, from home, a machinery salesman with T.B. Wicke Sons, you may know him, who dropped off the train here a week ago Saturday.

Page 20

He saw me on the street one day, and then he went and told everybody that I was in Texas because I'd been drummed from home. Said I went out rowing with a girl and upset her and then swam off for my skin and she was nearly drowned. I've made some good friends here—or had made them, I'd better say—and one of them rode out to our place and said I ought to know what Bellows was saying, so I could thrash him before he skipped town. Oh, what could I say.Then I saw Miss Taylor just now, she's the girl from the East I mentioned in the winter, and she asked me had I heard what they were saying. I wanted to lie to her, and she'd have believed me if I had, but you couldn't lie to her, and so I said straight out I was crazy drunk at the time and didn't know what I was doing, but I guessed most of it was true. She cares a lot about those things, and I think she'd been crying. God help me. So now everything's changed here; it reminds me of home the way people look at me. Miss Taylor was the worst, she's been so fine to me. She said come to see her in two or three days, when she'd had time to think, and if she casts me off, I can't stand it here any longer, and I don't see how I can begin all over again, just when life was seeming as if it might be worth while again.So now, you see, V.V., why I wasn't prompter answering your letter. I've tried to keep my courage up like you advised, but it's too much for one man to carry. May you never know the awful feeling that you're an outcast, not wanted anywhere, is the wish of

Your unhappy friend, DAL.

P.S. How's father, do you ever see him these days? Don't let him know any of this.

The girl looked through the rose-flowered curtains down into the sunny street....

Dalhousie had long since become but a shadow and a name to Cally; she had willed it so, and so it had been. Now, in his own poor scrawl, the ghost of a lover too roughly discarded rose and walked again. And beneath the cheap writing and the unrestrained self-pity, she seemed to plumb for the first time the depths of the boy's present misery. The old story, having struck him down once, had hunted him out and struck him down again. Where now would he hide?...

The too reminiscent letter had come with the inopportunity of destiny. A little more pressure and she was done for.

But this was mere mad folly. To shake it off at once, Cally began to walk about her bedchamber. Nothing had really happened that had not been true all along. She wished more than ever that it had all been started differently, but it was too late to consider that now. She must think of herself, and of Hugo and mamma. Dalhousie's friend had done his worst, and she could still withstand it. Once in New York, once in Europe, and all would be as it had been before....

Nevertheless, she was presently weak enough to open the letter again. Now her eye fell upon two lines written in the margin at the top of the first page, which she had missed before. They were in the writing of the envelope, and read:

Page 21

> You can reach me at any time, day or night, through Meeghan's Grocery—Jefferson 4127.

The words sprang up at her, and she stared back at them fascinated. The man at the Dabney House was certain that she would tell now. He thought the resolution might come on her suddenly, as in the night. Nominally, he left it to her; yet at the same time he contrived to make her feel caught in a trap, with no alternative, with this sense of enormous pressure upon her. She remembered the man's strange, stern words to her: "You can't be happy now, till you let the truth be known."

All at once it seemed almost as if there were some one in the room with her. She looked around hastily: but of course there was no one. She became very much frightened....

There came a knock on the door, and a voice:

"Genaman in the parlor to see you, Miss Cyahlile. Mist' Avery."

"I can't come down."

"Ma'am?"

"Say I'm not well and am lying down."

In the hall below, the parlormaid Annie encountered Mrs. Heth, waked from her nap by the two rings at the bell. Mrs. Heth ascended to Carlisle's room and rattled the knob.

"Cally?... Why, your door's locked!"

The door opened, and Carlisle confronted her mother with a white tremulous face.

"What's the matter?" said Mrs. Heth, gliding in with an expression of maternal solicitude. "Annie said you weren't well and were lying down."

"I'm not well ... Mamma, let's go to New York to-morrow."

"Go *to-morrow!*... Why, *what's* the matter?"

"Nothing. Only I—I'm so tired of being at home."

Then her strained stiffness broke abruptly, and she flung her arms around her mother's neck with an hysterical abandon by no means characteristic.

“Oh, I can’t stand it here another day. *I* can’t! Please, please, mamma! It must be not having Hugo. I can’t explain—it’s just the way I feel. I’m so miserable here, I could die. *Please*, mamma!...”

Mrs. Heth, detecting with alarm the incipiences of a dangerous flare-up, said with startling gentleness:

“There, there, dear! Mamma will arrange it as you wish.”

XIX

How it is One Thing to run away from yourself, and another to escape; how Cally orders the Best Cocktails, and gazes at her Mother asleep; also of Jefferson 4127, and why Mamma left the Table in a hurry at the Cafe des Ambassadeurs.

Mamma arranged it, by Amazonian effort. New York, the colossal, received the runaway with an anonymous roar, asking no questions. Here, in the late afternoon of the first day, safe forever in a well-furnished room on a seventeenth floor, Cally Heth made her answer to Dalhousie’s letter. She formally cremated the scrawl in a pink saucer which had previously been doing nothing more useful in the world than holding up a toothbrush mug.

Page 22

The cremation was a rite in its way, yet required only the saucer and two matches. The letter, when well torn, flamed nicely, only a few scraps holding out against immediate combustion. There was one little fragment on top, observable from the beginning; it read:

or night
fferson 4127

These topmost bits refused to respond to poking with the burnt match, and finally demanded a new match all to themselves. Within two minutes all were reduced to fine ashes, which the priestess of the rite duly took to the window, and scattered down into the "court." Then she washed her hands, put the saucer back under the mug, and raised another window to let out the smell.

This business completed, Carlisle glanced at her watch. It was ten minutes past six, or nearly time to begin to dress. The moment was an interlude in a day which had been full of exciting activity, keyed with the joy of journey's end and lovers' meeting. An evening in similar titillating vein waited just ahead. At this moment, Canning, bidden *an revoir* some ten minutes ago, was doubtless dressing at his club, seven blocks away. Mrs. Heth, left to her own resources all afternoon, had fallen asleep in her chair, and still slept. Even the maid Flora was absent, having been given the afternoon off, after unpacking two trunks, to "git to see" her uncle, a personage of authority who served his country well by sorting letters in the New York Post-Office.

Alone in the hotel bedroom, Carlisle looked in the mirror of the mahoganized "dresser," occupied in taking off her veil and hat, and thought that Flora ought to be coming back now. Then she sniffed a little and was aware of a memorial smell from the rite. After that her mind appeared to float away for a time, and when she caught up with it again, it was thinking:

Nothing so much could really have happened, if I *had* told.

It was an academic thought for a mind which must have known very well that everything was settled now. Carlisle, assuming charge herself, promptly turned it out. Having put her hat on the bed, she began to busy herself with preparations for the evening. Flora lingering at her avuncular pleasures, she herself went to the closet and took down a dress. A capable girl she was, who could easily get out her own clothes when absolutely necessary.

Canning was dining the two ladies at the resplendent establishment of his choice, at seven-thirty o'clock; he was due to return in an hour now. All day he had been in attendance, and all day he had been the very prince of lovers. Having lunched with Mrs. Heth and Carlisle at their hotel, he and his betrothed had spent the whole afternoon together jogging about the May-time park in a hansom-cab,—such was her

whim,—with late tea at the Inn of renown upon the Drive: and through all, such talk as sped the hours on wings. How fascinating he was, she seemed to have forgotten, in these days of absence and worry. And how strong and all-conquering!—a man of such natural lordliness of mien that cabmen and policemen, proud men and strangers as they were, spoke to him with something akin to respect.

Page 23

Yes, Hugo was, indeed, a rock and tower of strength. With him behind her, she had the world at her feet.... Heavens! What could gossip possibly do to Mrs. Hugo Canning?

Outside was the roar of conglomerate humanity. Up here in this strange bedroom, indifferent host to a thousand transient souls, it was quiet and even a little lonely. Once more Carlisle caught her mind at its retrospective misbehavior, and once more turned the key on it. Having laid out her dress on the bed, she stood and looked down into the cheerless light-well a minute, and then decided to wake up her mother. But she stopped on the way and turned back. Why wake up mamma half an hour too soon, just to hear the sound of one's own voice?

She took off her watch, and raised her hands to begin unfastening her waist. But she became engrossed in staring back at her reflection in the mirror, and presently her hands dropped.

Face and form, background and destiny, she was possessed of blessings many and obvious: all crowned now, sealed and stamped, with the love of Hugo Canning, which, he had pledged himself, was a love which should not die. What girl so entirely successful as she? Convincingly the excellent glass gave back the presentment of loveliness endowed with all the gifts of Fortune.

And yet she had run away: there was no evading that. An insignificant boy thousands of miles away had sent out a cry for help, and she, the proud and blessed, who had always considered herself quite as spunky as another person, had bolted in a panic. And she had bolted too fast, it seemed, to consider even that, with that cry, there had come a new element into the situation, disturbing to the old argument. The full reach and meaning of Jack Dalhousie's letter seemed to be coming upon her now for the first time, just when she had ritually cremated it. Out of the pink saucer had mysteriously blown the knowledge that the author of that poor composition could no more be pictured as doing splendidly down in Texas....

For a third time her over-mind spied upon and detected the nether's treason; and this time Cally, turning abruptly from the mirror, was troubled. Having run away, could she not at least enjoy a runaway's peace? Why backward glances now? She had escaped Dalhousie. She had escaped Dalhousie's friend. She stood in this room the safest person in the world. No one on earth could betray her except herself.

The watch ticked loud, steadily drawing Hugo, and mamma and Flora. Up through the windows came the twilight and the rumble of the vast heedless city. Carlisle snapped on the lights. And then all at once, without warning, there closed down upon her an enormous depression, a sense as of standing on the brink of irretrievable disaster. Or it was as if she had run away, indeed, but had not escaped. Or as if, in cutting herself off from the past, she had cut away something important, which something here gave notice that it would not be peacefully abandoned. And mixed with this there was again

that sense of large pressure upon her, so tangible that it was almost like a person in the room with her, sharing, dominating her councils....

Page 24

She was far from understanding these feelings, but she did understand that she felt suddenly sickish and quite faint; and she thought practically of mamma's little flask of brandy in her bag somewhere, if only she could find it. Then speculations on this point vanished with the recollection that she stood in the modern Arabian Nights, all the resources of the world at her beck.

Cally stepped to the telephone and called down in a small but authoritative voice:

"Send me up a cocktail at once, please. Room 1704."

"Yes, mum," replied the experienced voice far below. "What kind would you wish?"

"Oh ... the best," said she, less authoritatively; and then, rang off hurriedly, thinking how funny it was that she couldn't produce the name of a cocktail when needed, since papa shook one up for himself nearly every evening, and Hugo always ordered them when they dined together, and laughed at the little faces she made....

The cocktail came, on rubber heels, and she sipped it, walking about the room and not thinking at all about dressing. A spoonful or so of the yellow concoction, and the sickish feeling vanished, and she felt instead rather devilish and fast, like the blondined villainess in a play. She was a daring woman of the new school, a Woman with a Past, who rang up hotel bars and ordered the best cocktails sent up at once....

Possibly the cocktail had this moral reaction, that she no longer sought to discipline her mind. She sipped the drink gingerly, and her thought fluttered backward and forward, full of contradictions and repetitions, as thought is in life, but now free.... Suppose, after all, that her past was not escaped? It wasn't such an easy thing to do, it seemed. Dalhousie thought he had escaped his, but it had run him down at last, way off in Texas. Suppose Dr. Vivian now decided (in view of her being a fugitive) that it was his duty to lay the matter before Colonel Dalhousie, and the tempestuous Colonel took the next train....

There was a knock at the door, causing her to start violently, and spill some of the cocktail. However, it was not Colonel Dalhousie, but only the maid Flora, who entered with that air of eager hurry so characteristic of an habitually tardy race. It appeared that the infernal powers had conspired against her promptitude in the shape of a blockade, not to mention losting her way through the malicious misdirection of a white man selling little men that danced on a string....

Having learned further that the postal uncle was poly las' month but tollable now, Flora's young mistress said:

"We must dress in a hurry now, Flora. It's quarter to seven."

And then she went on through to the sitting-room of the suite, to wake her mother, thinking: “I can’t go on this way the rest of my life, jumping out of my skin every time there’s a knock.... What on earth have I been so afraid of?...”

Page 25

Mrs. Heth slept on in her deep-bosomed chair, undisturbed by the click of switch or burst of light into her enveloping dusk. She had a magazine, face downward, in her lap; also a one-pound box of mixed chocolates, open. Her head had fallen upon her chair-back; a position which brought the strange dark little mustache into prominence, and also threw into relief the unexpected heaviness of the jaw and neck. The face of an indomitable creature, certainly, of one of those fittest to survive; but not exactly a spiritual face, perhaps, hardly a face finely sensitive to immaterial values....

To gaze at a person who is unaware of being watched may be worse than eavesdropping. Arrested in the act of waking her mother, Carlisle stood for some moments looking down at her. What was there lacking in mamma that you couldn't ever talk things over with her? Upon the unconscious face it was plainly inscribed that this lady would stand against telling to the last ditch. Somehow the knowledge brought the daughter no comfort....

And now that she stopped to consider in calm security, what, really, if she did send Vivian a little note just before she sailed, authorizing him to tell? What had she, of all people, to fear from the clacking tattle of a few old cats? Suppose, to-morrow, she calmly said to Hugo and mamma, "I've felt all along that I did him an injustice, and now that I know he's so unhappy, I want to set it straight." What, really, could they say that would be so bad? If there was a price for telling, it appeared now that there was a price also for not telling.

Minutes passed ...

And then at the shake, Mrs. Heth stirred, turned, rolled a little, and opened her eyes with a start and a blink.

"I must have dropped asleep," said she.

"No!" said Cally; and she gave a sudden gay burst of laughter.

"I don't see anything so funny in that," said Mrs. Heth, yawning and sitting up. "What time is it?"

"I think it's a perfect scream, and it's nearly seven, and Hugo will be here at quarter past, punctually. *Now* will you fly?"

"You might have waked me a little earlier. Good gracious!... How long have you been in? Anything happen while I napped?"

"Not a single, solitary, blessed thing.... There you are!—Easy does it!"

"I'll be dressed long before you are now," was the maternal retort, accompanied by a long stretch.

And, though unchallenged, she was as good as her word. Highly efficient at the toilet as elsewhere, she required small assistance from Flora, whom she dispatched to tidy up the sitting-room instead. The good little lady was armed cap-a-pie by seven-fifteen, at which time a glance into Carlisle's room revealed much backwardness there, not concealed by the appearances of haste. Hugo would have to wait, that was clear; and just as it was clear, up Mr. Canning's name came skipping from the office.

Page 26

In the tidied-up sitting-room Mrs. Heth entertained her distinguished son-to-be, during the little delay. She always enjoyed a good talk with Hugo. He was her pledge of a well-spent life, her Order of Merit, her V.C. and Star and Garter, rolled together in a single godlike figure. She beamed upon him, tugging at white gloves half a size too small. Canning tapped a well-shod foot with his walking-stick, and wished for his love.

The wish grew by what it fed on, and the banquet ran long. Half an hour passed before the door from Mrs. Heth's bedroom opened and Carlisle appeared. However, she looked worth waiting for. She shimmered a moment from the threshold, and the two in the sitting-room thought together that they had never seen her so radiantly lovely.

"I made her!" thought Mrs. Heth.

"Mine!" thought Canning.

And Cally thought, her eyes upon her lover: "*Me afraid!*..."

"My dear Cally! Really, I can say nothing for you but better late than never," said mamma.

"Salutations!" said Hugo, rising. "And by Jove! What a perfectly stunning dress!"

"Oh, do you like it?" said Carlisle, trailing forward, her eyes shining. "Then you won't scold, will you, if my watch *was* a trifle slow! And I should have been ready hours ago, even at that, but for Flora's over-staying at her uncle's. Tell Mr. Canning, Flora, wasn't it all your fault?"

And Flora, having followed her young mistress in with the carriage-cloak, giggled into her hand as at a royal jest and said yas'm, it certny was....

In holiday vein the trio departed from the suite, dropped sixteen stories in the lift, and presently came by taxicab to the Cafe des Ambassadeurs, where had taken place the memorable dinner for two, just two months ago to a night....

Here all was glittering and gay. The Ambassadeurs, pending the arrival of something newer, was on the pinnacle of expensive popularity. At this hour everything was in fullest swing, and the impressive looking major-domo was shaking his head without hope to arriving applicants who had not ordered a table beforehand, as Hugo had done by messenger.

The Heth ladies turned into the cloak-room to remove their wraps. The air of vivacity pervading the place, or possibly it was her daughter's staccato liveliness, entered the blood of Mrs. Heth: she was imperious with the ladies' maid who assisted with the unwrapping. Carlisle, strolling about as she unbuttoned her gloves, came to the elaborate screen which sheltered the doorway and glanced out. Directly opposite, over

the brilliant corridor, her gaze fell upon the glass and yellow-wood of a long-distance telephone booth.

Then she caught sight of Hugo, and smiled at him, and at the same moment mamma's voice said at her elbow:

"There's Hugo, waiting.... Are you ready?"

"And waiting, too," said Carlisle.

Page 27

They emerged from the ladies' bower into the stir of the antechamber. Met halfway by their escort, they proceeded toward the dining-room. Advance was a little slow; there was some confusion here and even crowding, replete diners blocking the way of those just going in. Just at the door, a party of five or six managed to come between Carlisle and Canning, who was dutifully looking out for his future mother-in-law; the girl became momentarily separated from her protectors. Or perhaps it was partly Cally's own fault, precipitated by the sight of a page standing near, who certainly seemed to have been stationed there by the hand of Providence....

Having stared fascinated at this page for half a second, Carlisle brought him to her side by a nod. The lad was fifteen and had seen lovely ladies in his time, but raising his eyes to this one, he acknowledged that she was a Queen.

"Call long distance for me, boy.... I'll write the number."

The boy produced pad and pencil, and she scribbled rapidly, a smile hovering over the sweet mouth whose slight irregularity charmed the eye beyond flawlessness.

Why, indeed, wait longer, running and sticking one's head in the sand, when here was the telephone, immediate and conclusive, when she felt now so brave and sure, and could tell mamma and Hugo this very night without a tremor? All was simple now, and highly adventurous besides. And then there was Jack Dalhousie to whom even a day or two, now that she stopped to think of it, would probably make a good deal of difference....

Turning again with bright cheeks, Cally encountered strange faces; and then, in a second or two, the familiar ones of her mother and Canning, both looking back for her....

"There you are!" she laughed, coming up with them again. "What an exciting jam!"

They proceeded into the dining-place and to their table, a somewhat ceremonial progress headed by three spiketails. Even in that display of beauty, wealth, consequence, and their lifelike imitations, these three, or perhaps we should say these two, drew much attention. Carlisle was conscious of lorgnettes; once she caught the whisper of the name so soon to be her own. Late as they were, the room was still crowded: the well-bred but wandering eye saw no vacant seat anywhere. There was music in the air, and the clash of cutlery, the vocal hum, and the faint tinkle of glasses. There were flushing faces and eyes that sparkled like the wine, and of it, many fragrances commingled, of flowers, chefs' *chefs-d'oeuvre*, of Pinaud and Roget. Through all, too, was to be felt the hard inquisitive stare of New York, each man wondering who and whence his neighbor was, speculating under his smile as to which man of them made, on the whole, the best appearance, seemed most plentiful of his money....

Pink-shaded candles stood on the little table; also La France roses of Canning's purchasing; also glasses, three more of them brought as they took their seats.

Page 28

“Do you spurn your cocktail, Carlisle?” asked Canning, and when she convivially indicated that she didn’t, he added, man to man: “How!”

“How,” said Cally.

She touched it to her lips, giving back his smile over the rim of her glass, and feeling gay, indeed. Two cocktails before one dinner—well!

“What kind of one is this, Hugo?” she demanded, quite knowingly.

Canning named it.

“Well, then,” said she, “it was a Bronx I had before.”

She did not say before what, and nobody asked. About them, as they sat in the lively hum, circled servitors without end. One fellow had brought their bit of caviare; another bore away the traces of it; another had no share of them but to fetch crisp rolls. Little omnibuses in white suits moved about, gathering up papers or napkins dropped by careless diners; bigger omnibuses in dinner jackets exported trays of dishes which the lordly artists of the serving force were above touching. Other varlets merely stood about and cooed....

Dinner, having begun with the cocktails, swept on with a rattle of talk. There was debate about the theatre afterwards. The girl’s eyes turned often toward the door.

“What do you think of it all, Carlisle?”

“Sweet, Hugo!... So simple and artless and homey!”

“Exactly,” said Canning; and obtained permission for a cigarette. “But yet interesting as a vaudeville show, don’t you think? What so amusing as to see human vanity displaying itself not merely without reserve but with a terrific blowing of horns?”

“Well put, Hugo!” said Mrs. Heth, who held that any kind of generalization constituted good talk. She added: “Who are all these people? How would one place them?”

Canning could indicate a celebrity or two. He had bowed several times, finding acquaintances, it seemed, even in this glittering farrago. But his eyes returned to his bride-to-be, from whom he removed his gaze with reluctance to-night. She wore a dress of yellow crepe-de-chine, with a draped arrangement of blue chiffon, which followed faithfully the long lines of her figure; and a hat of blue straw with an uncurled yellow plume. It was a beautiful dress, though mamma considered it just a thought too low, even with a handkerchief put in.

And Cally looked back at her lover and thought: Who so honored and honorable as he? He'll only be sorry that I've waited so long....

"Only," she said, aloud, "they do keep the room rather hot for the provinces, where some air is preferred. More good things to eat, Hugo? It's a collation...."

"A poor one, I'm afraid. You've touched nothing."

He dispatched an army of men to adjust electric fans, turn patent ventilators, and even to do so crude a thing as open a window.

"It is all most delicious, Hugo," reassured Mrs. Heth. "I hadn't noticed that the room was warm, either."

"My cheeks are burning. Touch my hand, Hugo. You see it's on fire."

Page 29

All three looked up as a boy in buttons stood at Carlisle's elbow, and said:

"Got your party on the wire, mum."

"Party on the wire? What's this?" said mamma.

Carlisle laid her napkin on the table. Surprise confronted her, written large on the faces of her mother and her lover; but it did not arrest her.

"I'm wanted at the telephone. Do you mind, Hugo? I won't he gone a minute."

"*But*—you mustn't go *now*, my dear!" said Mrs. Heth, astonished. "Let the boy take the number. Why—who on earth could it be, calling you *here?*—"

"I'd rather go now, mamma, if Hugo'll forgive me—"

"It's from Flora!" said Mrs. Heth, positively. "No one else knew. A telegram's come, saying your father is sick—"

Carlisle laughed and rose dazzingly, burning without but colder than Alpine snow within.

"Not in the least, mamma dear! You see I put in this call myself. I'll explain all about it in a minute...."

Explain! Why she would walk back to this table from the telephone, laughing, and saying: "Now, praise me, Hugo and mamma, for I've just been doing a deed of mercy! Do you remember that day at the Beach?..." Was it the fear of this that she had let plague her all these days?...

"To be answered *here*—at dinner—in this public place? Why, my dear Cally, I really...."

But Hugo, the understanding, though personally opposed to interruptions during dinner, knew the folly of arguing with the whims of the unreasoners. He had risen with Carlisle, and now said: "I'll show you the way."

Cally gave him a look of exquisite gratitude, but answered: "*Please* don't trouble, Hugo! The boy will—"

"No trouble. Let's be off before the tolls eat you out of house and home."

"Oh, no! Please don't! Couldn't I have my way about such a little matter, Hugo dear?"

In this glaring publicity, the dialogue began to take on something of the nature of a "scene." Canning yielded with perfect grace.

"Of course you can, if you really prefer it. Well, then!... Hurry back."

“In two minutes,” said she, with certainty; and smiled brightly into mamma’s censorious concern.

On the heels of the proud page, Cally threaded her way among the glittering tables for the telephone and Jefferson 4127, unaware for once that she was the cynosure of many eyes. She was buoyed within, thrilled with a sense of strange adventure, baffling to analysis, but somehow comparable to that soaring moment last week. She was captain of her soul. That she was now standing by her flare-up, deliberately reattaching herself to a past which she had moved heaven and earth to cut away from her, did not occur to her, in just that way. But she was conscious of a curious inner sense of freedom, and somehow of fulfilment. And now she saw that she must have been secretly thinking of doing this for some time, nibbling fearfully at the idea....

Page 30

She was alone in a glass booth, with a telephone before her, receiver off its hook. She sat down, put the receiver to her ear, and said:

“Hello?”

[Illustration: *PLEASE* DON’T TROUBLE, HUGO]

There reached her only a faint great buzzing, the humming of distant wires, fleeting snatches of talk a long way off, striking out of nowhere back into nothing.... And now she was the Lady Bountiful, stepping aside a moment from her brilliant entourage to scatter boons to the poor and needy. Jack Dalhousie would know to-morrow morning, at the latest, by the telegram from his friend Mr. V.V.,—as that little creature called him,—and whatever vexation he might be inclined to feel towards her at first, his joy and his father’s would soon dispose of that. And of course he would hurry straight off with his news to that girl from the East he had fallen in love with—what a hand he was for affairs, poor old Jack!—and....

Out of the confused murmuring, a soft voice spoke clearly:

“Hello, New York. I got your party. What’s the matter?”

A nasal voice gave answer, apparently at Carlisle’s elbow:

“Well, be ca’m, little one. You people got the rush-bug worsen some full-size cities aintyer? Butt out and gimme a chanst. Hello! W’ere arey’r, Bassadoors!”

“Here I am,” said Bassadoors.

“Miss Heth?”

“I am Miss Heth.”

“Minute ’m....”

In the glass beside her Cally caught a reflection of her head and bare shoulders, and her eyes were shining, the long and slightly tri-corner eyes so piquantly fringed. A minute—that was all it would take. A minute more and she would thread her way back through the glitter to Hugo and mamma, and Hugo at least would say well-done....

“Well, whatsermatter? There y’ are!”

The soft voice said: “All right, Dr. Vivian. Ready now!... Hello! All right....”

“Hello,” said Cally.

Then all sounds faded away, and out of a sudden great desert of silence, she heard a man's voice, clear though it came all the way from Meeghan's Grocery, across the street from the old Dabney House, back home.

"Hello?"

Mr. V.V.!

And the moment she heard that voice, Carlisle was aware that her feeling toward the owner of it had mysteriously changed somewhere in the last week, that he stood in her mind now almost as a friend. Had he not been, by the strangeness of fate, her one confidant in the world, who now could never think of her again as a poor little thing?...

"Dr. Vivian?... Can you guess who it is? Or did the operator give me away?"

"Yes.... I don't hear you very well.... Where are you?"

"I'm in New York, if you please, to sail for Europe next week! We left home last night.... Is that better?"

"Yes.... That's much better."

Mr. V.V.'s voice, over the long miles of wire, sounded strained and hard; but the girl noticed nothing, being full of novel thrills.

Page 31

“Perhaps you can guess why I’ve called you up.... Though, you know, it was to be a secret unless you saw me again, and *I* really don’t count a letter as seeing!...”

“I didn’t see you,” came back the unfamiliar voice. “I am to blame.”

“Ah, but the letter was just as good,” said Carlisle, and laughed excitedly into the transmitter. And then, having never admitted any particular sense of guilt, having felt almost no “conviction of sin” as religious fellows would term it, she went on without the smallest embarrassment: “You see, I flew into a panic for some reason, and didn’t mean for you ever to see me again. I ran away! And then I couldn’t get his letter out of mind—I’d never taken it in that he was so miserable, really!—and I was quite ashamed of being such a coward. And so,” she said, the upward-lifting lip pressing the instrument in her eagerness, “I’ve called up now to say I want—”

His voice broke in, not with the burst of praise and thanksgiving she had looked for, but only to say abruptly and anti-climacterically:

“I can’t hear you. Will you say that again?”

However, but few words were needed, after all, to ring this climax. Carlisle said, slowly and distinctly:

“I say I want you to tell Mr. Dalhousie now—and his father, too. To-night, if you wish.”

Then there was a desolating silence, out of which she heard something far off like a man groaning.

“Hello!” she called sharply. “Are you there?”

“Where are you, Miss Heth?” was Dr. Vivian’s reply; and his voice was like the voice of the man who had groaned....

“Are you in your room at the hotel? Is your mother with you there?”

Singular words these, from the receiver of confidences and high favors. There fell upon Cally a nameless fear.

“N-no—I’m alone—Why, what—”

“Could I speak to your mother a moment—first? I have some bad news. It would be better—”

“No—tell me! My mother’s at dinner. I—what are you talking about?...”

Had he betrayed her already, then? Was the town now ringing with her name? Had Colonel Dalhousie ...

Quite distinctly, though he evidently was not addressing her, she heard the man's hard voice say: "This cannot be borne."

And then in a different voice, there came these words over the miles from Meeghan's Grocery:

"Miss Heth;—I didn't see you when I should have—and now we are just too late. I can't reach Dal now."

"You—don't mean?..."

"He is dead."

"Dead!"

And it was this girl's shame, the fruit of her long fear, that her first feeling was one of base relief. So works Nature's first law. Dal was dead; all was settled; there was nothing to tell now. And then, as by the turning of a corner, she came front to front with a sudden horror, and there unrolled before her a moment of blackness....

Page 32

“You must not blame yourself too hard,” came the distant voice, dropping out of space like the sentences of destiny. “It’s ... cruel, the way it’s happened. But you’ll always know you had the courage and the will to set him free, when you might—”

Carlisle’s hand clenched the edge of the little table where she sat.

“Tell me,” said her voice, pitifully faint. “Did he ... I—must know—Did he ...?”

There was a roaring in her ears, but through it the words came clear as flame:

“He went out of his mind. I know that. That could not be foreseen. Not waiting ... he took his own life. It was this afternoon. A telegram came—from some friend of his....”

All further words, if more there were, bounded off from the sudden iron stillness within her. Mechanically she raised the receiver to the hook, for was not her talk with Meeghan’s quite finished? Jack Dalhousie had killed himself. Sackcloth and ashes would not get a telegram to him now.... And then, some flying remembrance of the bearer of the tidings struck through her numbness, and she caught down the receiver again and said indistinctly:

“I can’t talk any more now.... I’ll be all right....”

Then all thought stopped, and her head went forward upon her hands. The yellow plume nodded bravely....

Outside the door of the booth was the brilliant corridor, and beyond a glimpse of the dining-room, pretty with shaded lights, gay with music and talk, and eyes that stared unabashed. Somewhere in there were Mrs. Heth and Canning, dining well.

The page stood near, the call-slip offered upon his tray. He, who admired her, was aware of a subtle distortion in this lady’s winning loveliness.

“Take it, please,” said she, “to the lady at the table where you found me. And say I shall not come back to dinner.”

Then Carlisle found herself in the cloak-room, which happened to be empty except for the smiling maid. She had hardly entered and repelled the woman’s overtures, when she heard the hurried step of her mother, brought quickly by the buttons’ strange words.

“Cally! Are you ill? What on earth’s happened?”

Cally sat stiffly in a chair against the wall, her face colorless. Different, this, from the telling she had contemplated, not five minutes ago. What had happened, indeed?

She said in a small flat voice: “I heard some bad news—over the telephone. A man—-has died. He killed himself, this afternoon—”

Commanding even in that moment, Mrs. Heth turned upon the hovering maid and said: “A glass of water.”

When the woman had passed out of earshot, she turned again, and put her two strong hands on Cally’s shoulders.

“What man? Who was this you called up long-distance?”

“Mr. Dalhousie,” said Cally’s small voice. “I called up a friend of his....” She looked up fixedly at her mother and said: “Mamma, he did it because of me.”

Page 33

The name of ill omen staggered the mother a little. Her voice was half harsh, half frightened:

“Because of you! You are ill, my poor child. The shock has upset you. You are out of your head. The boy’s mind was unhinged by drink. Every one said so. He had broken his father’s heart with—”

“But he did this because of me. Because of what I let everybody think of him.... Mamma, I—I must go back home. I’m sorry to upset everything so....”

The maid stood by with her tray and glass, but no hand reached for the offering.

“Back to the hotel? Of course!—you are ill, my poor dear! You need rest....”

“I mean back home. You see I can’t be here now ... when this has happened. I must go now, to-night. I remember the train goes at nine-fifty-five.”

Mrs. Heth, wheeling upon the maid with livid perturbation, cried:

“Get my wraps.”

XX

In which Jack Dalhousie wears a New Dignity, and the Lame Stranger comes to the House of Heth.

Dalhousie had been worthless while he lived. Now he had achieved the last supreme importance. The inconsiderable of yesterday wore a mute and mighty power. So he reached over the spaces, and broke the brilliant dinner-party at the Cafe des Ambassadeurs. So Mrs. Heth and Carlisle Heth disputed, by this new great dignity that was his, and talked in the hotel bedroom, and hurriedly changed evening attire for travelling suits. And so Hugo Canning, abruptly widowed at a railway station, was left to toss wakefully that night, ridden by deepening anxieties....

For Cally had carried her extraordinary point; now that Jack Dalhousie was henceforward indifferent to all these matters.

She had said, with the deadly flatness of the mood which her mother so dreaded, that she wanted to go home to-night, and there had been no reasoning with her. Go home for what? Mrs. Heth had asked it twenty times, battling desperately against the menacing madness, now with argument and threat, now with tears and wheedlings. And Cally, proceeding dry-eyed with her dressing and bag-packing, had proved unable to produce a single solid reason.

Still, it became clear that lock and key would not keep her. The options ensuing were whether her mother should go with her, or Hugo should go, or Cally be allowed to go alone. Small choice here, indeed.

Of that evening the events following the hurried departure from the Ambassadeurs were always blurred in Carlisle's memory. To Mrs. Heth each detail remained crystal-clear as long as she lived. Upon her shoulders, as usual, fell the burden of managing everything so that the least harm should befall. Defeated, and consequently hatted and cloaked, she emerged from the bedroom at quarter-past nine o'clock, commissioned by her daughter to tell Canning everything. But what was everything, and what the mere gibberish of nervous insanity, to pass forever from the horizon with a good night's sleep? Mrs. Heth, seated before her living Order of Merit in the sitting-room, interpreted her commission with a mother's wise discretion.

Page 34

Canning, at this point, knew only that Carlisle was unnerved by news of the death of a friend. In the drive from the restaurant he had been cautioned to ask no questions, hysterics being intimated otherwise. Now Mrs. Heth gave him certain selected particulars: of a man who had been in love with Carlisle some years ago, though she had always discouraged him; of a misunderstanding that had arisen between them, which he, the man, had never got over; and now of his sudden decease, which came as a shock to the poor girl, awakening painful memories, and giving rise to a purely momentary sense of morbid responsibility.

“But why,” said Canning, more and more mystified as he listened, “should she want to go back home?”

“I regard it,” answered Mrs. Heth, “as a tribute to the dead.”

“Why, she doesn’t know what she’s doing!... You must simply forbid her going.”

“Forbid her!” groaned the little general, like one flicked upon a new wound.

And, before proceeding further, she was actually artful and strong enough to make the young man arrange—provisionally, she said,—about reservations, a matter which valuably consumed time.

If the good lady had now believed that all was lost, she would have instantly invoked Canning’s authority, telling him everything. But as yet she would not risk that, clinging hard to the hope that Cally’s sanity might come again with the sun of a new day. To-night she was for the greatest suppression possible, one eye perpetually on the little travelling-clock. However, the telephoning at last over, more details could not be avoided. It perforce transpired that the dead man was the villain of that unfortunate episode at the Beach, which Hugo possibly recalled,—he did,—and finally that it was worry over his disgrace, aided by unremitting potations, that had brought him to his death....

The faint frown on Hugo’s brow deepened, became more troubled. He paced the floor.

“And still,” said he, “I fail to see why Carlisle must go home to-night. What does she expect to do when she gets there?”

What, indeed? Mrs. Heth mentioned again the tribute to the dead. The girl, in her shocked state, considered it unfeeling for her to remain here enjoying herself with Hugo, as if nothing had happened. Foolish?—who saw it better than she, Mrs. Heth? But that was Cally, sweet and good at heart always, yet liable to emotional fits in upset moments when opposition only made her ill. Let her have her morbid way to-night, and she would return in twenty-four hours, her own sweet natural self....

Canning liked it less and less. Was not this clearly a moment when the strong mind of a man should assert itself over foolish feminine hysteria?

“How did she happen to get this news just now?” he asked, abruptly. “Who was it she called up, about what?”

He had lost sight of this point in the general flurry of sensation. It struck him now just too late to bring results. At the moment, the door from the bedrooms opened—exactly as it had two hours earlier, only with what a difference!—and Carlisle appeared on, the threshold, very pale and subdued, but to her lover’s eye never more moving.

Page 35

“I’m so sorry to bring you into all this trouble, Hugo,” she said, in a strained little voice.... “And when we were having such a happy time....”

All thought of putting down his foot faded at once from Canning’s mind, obliterated in a wave that went through him, half passion, half pure tenderness. Indifferent to Mrs. Heth, he advanced and took the girl in his arms, speaking in a manly way the sympathy with her distress which rushed up in him at that moment. And then he said words that went with Carlisle as a comfort all through the night.

“Your trouble is my own, Carlisle. I’m with you in everything now, happiness or unhappiness. Whatever happens, you know my heart and strength are yours through all time.”

Carlisle, too deeply moved to speak, thanked her lover with a look. The moment’s silence was broken by Mrs. Heth, resolutely blowing her nose. And then all opportunity for talk was lost in the rush for the train.

* * * * *

To herself she seemed to lie endlessly between sleeping and waking: and the rhythmic noises of the train sounded a continual cadence, Dalhousie’s unquiet requiem. But she must have fallen sound asleep without knowing it; for her eyes opened suddenly with a start, and she was aware of the clanging of bells, the waxing and waning of men’s voices, the hiss of steam and the flaring of yellow lights. Looking out under the blind, she saw that they had come to a city, which must be Philadelphia. Two hours nearer home....

Now her wakefulness had a sharper quality; Cally lay wide-eyed, in a dazed chill wonder. Once in the night she pushed up the curtain, raised herself on an elbow in the stateroom berth; and her splendid gay hair, loosened with much tossing, streamed downward over her shoulders. Outside was a world of moonlit peace. The flying trees had tops of silver; meadows danced by in splotches of light and shade; once they sped over a lovely river. Strange to think, that if she had but said on that far-away day, “He frightened me so, I didn’t want to call him hack,”—just those words, how few and simple, —she would not be hurrying home now, with everything ahead so dark, so terrifying. And, though she seemed to try a long time, she could not think now why she had not said these words, could not weigh those slight fanciful tremors against this vast icy void....

She fell asleep; woke again to more clanging and hissing; slept and dreamed badly; and suddenly sat up in the berth, confusedly, to find it broad day, and the sun streaming through the little crevice beneath the curtain. Her mother was standing braced in the aisle of the little room, dressing systematically.

“We’ve passed Penton. You’d better get up,” said the brisk familiar tones.

And she eyed her daughter narrowly as she asked if she had slept.

Home again. This time yesterday, who would have dreamed this possible?...

Page 36

And then, after just enough time to dress, they began to pass landmarks, and presently to slacken speed; and then they were stepping down from the train, out into the hotch-potch gathering on the sunny station platform.

Both women were heavily veiled. Mrs. Heth's furtive glances discovered no one who was likely to hail them, demanding what in the world these things meant. A ramshackle hack invited and received them. And, jogging over streets crowded with a life-time's associations, the Heths presently came to their own house, whose face they had not thought to see again these four months....

Mr. Heth was away, fishing, in a spot dear to his heart, but remote from railroad or telegraph. The House of Heth looked like a deserted house; its blinds were drawn from fourth story to basement. However, there was old Moses, bowing and running down the steps to open the carriage door and assist with the hand-luggage. He greeted the ladies with courtliness, and inquired mout anybody be sick. Answered vaguely on this point, he announced that he had breakfast ready-waiting on the table; this, though Mr. Canning's telegraph never retched him till nea'bout eight o'clock. His tone indicated a pride of accomplishment not, he hoped, unjustified.

Having removed the more superficial stains of travel, the two women sat at table in the half-dismantled dining-room. It was a meal not easily to be forgotten, made the more fantastic by Mrs. Heth's determined attempts to act as if nothing in particular had happened. From her remarks to the ancient family retainer it appeared that she and Miss Carlisle had returned home to attend to a business matter of no great consequence, overlooked in the rush of departure. And she demanded, quite as if that were the very business referred to, whether the plumber had come to stop the drip in the white-room bathroom.

The butler's reply took a not unfamiliar direction. The plumber, and his helper, had come and 'xperimented round: but they had not yet stopped the drip....

Mrs. Heth ate heartily, with a desperate matter-of-factness. It was half-past nine o'clock. Nothing had happened yet, at any rate. Beside her, Carlisle had more difficulty with her breakfast, hampered by her continuing mind's-eye picture of Jack Dalhousie, lying on his back on a floor somewhere. Might it be that, as this horror made telling so much harder, it also altered the whole necessity? There were plenty of arguments of mamma's to that effect....

"Mr. Heth got off all right, Moses?" demanded that resolute lady. "Take some more tea, Cally. You must really try to eat something, my child—"

"I have eaten—a great deal," said Cally. And pushing back her chair then, she added: "I think I—I'll try to rest a little while, mamma. I feel—tired after the trip."

“Do!” said mamma, further encouraged. “Sleep a little if you can, my dear. It’s just what you need....”

Page 37

But Cally did not sleep. It had seemed to her that she must be alone for a time, to try to think out what was to happen; but now she saw that she had no need to think. Of the complex nervous and emotional reaction which had brought her flying home, she had, indeed, seemed to understand nothing except that it was irresistible; her mind was like a dark cloud, refusing to yield up its meanings. Nevertheless, there seemed to be no doubt as to what she must do now....

Mrs. Heth, having remained downstairs half an hour longer, ascended quietly, the beginnings of great gratitude in her heart. They were feelings born but to die. Just at the head of the stairs she encountered Cally, emerging like an apparition from the door of the family sitting-room. The girl spoke in a small voice:

“Mamma, I want to send for Dr. Vivian—to come and see me.”

Mamma, just thinking that this madness was finally disposed of, was taken suddenly. Even the birthmark on her temple, which was partially exposed, seemed to turn pale....

But once more Carlisle carried her extraordinary point. Ever since she was a little girl she had been subject to these incalculable fits, when punishment made her ill, but did not conquer the seven devils that possessed her. Mrs. Heth, frantic after nearly an hour’s thundering, vanished into the telephone-booth, bent upon reaching Mr. Heth while there was yet time. But even now her strongest thought was that Cally was a sensible girl at heart, in the last pinch simply incapable of self-destructive folly.

Cally, also, had thought of the telephone. But the sight of it, after last night, unnerved her. She withdrew to the little desk in her bedroom.

So the word of the Lord came to the Dabney House, by the hand of an old negro gentleman.

* * * * *

He was standing in the middle of the floor, when Carlisle went down, an inconsonant figure amid the showy splendors of the Heth drawing-room. So much appeared to the most casual observation. Far deeper to the understanding eye went the inconsistency of this man’s presence here, in an hour of appalling intimacy.

Carlisle, entering through the uncurtained doorway, halted involuntarily just over the threshold. Her eye, at least, saw all. And she was abruptly and profoundly affected by the sight of him in her familiar background, the author of the Beach opinion of her, who truly had never meant anything but trouble for her since the first moment she saw him. Time, indeed, had given the religious fellow his last full measure of revenge....

Prepared speeches of some dignity and length slipped from her. Cally spoke from her heart and her fear, without greeting, in a nervous childish voice:

“I—I wanted to see you, to—to ask you—to talk with you—as to what must be done....”

Jack Dalhousie’s friend bowed gravely. There was no victory on his face, neither was there any judgment.

Page 38

“I understood,” he said simply, “and was grateful to you.”

He, certainly, seemed aware of no discordance in himself. He advanced with a beautiful consistency, looking as if he wished to say more. But Cally, her hand gripping the back of a spindly gold divan, her gaze fallen, seemed suddenly to find her own tongue unloosed.

“It’s been so terrible,” she hurried on in the same flat, unpremeditated way—“no one could know.... I was in New York, and we were to sail for Europe in a few days. Everything was arranged, all our plans were made, oh, for months and months. And then.... And now I’ve come home—and everything is so upset—and so dreadfully complicated. And I haven’t seemed able to think somehow—to decide—”

“Try not to think about it at all,” said the man, with some firmness. “That’s the great compensation, that you can begin to forget about it now. Won’t you sit down?”

She sat down obediently, quite as if it were natural for him to be taking charge of her in her own drawing-room. And staring down at her locked hands, she fluttered on with no reference to him, with a kind of frightened incredulity, like a bird in a trap.

“It seems so unjust—so terribly *unfair*.... That all this could come from one little puff of wind!... He had gotten out of the boat. He was swimming away. And then there came one little gust. I had tied the sail, you see. He had frightened me. And now, after all these months.... But of course I never thought—I never dreamed of—of—”

“I know; I understand. No one dreamed it. You must keep sure of that,” said Vivian, in his natural voice. “I knew Dal very well indeed, you know; and I felt certain that he was—safe from this. You—you mustn’t think of it as something that could have been foreseen....”

He was looking down at her lowered face closely as he spoke; and went on without pause:

“You see—what upset him so was beyond your control or mine. I’ve heard nothing since the telegram last night. But—you may remember that he spoke of a girl in his letter, whose opinion he seemed to value. It must be that when he saw her again, she was very hard on him—so hard that he lost his grip for a moment. I can’t account for it in any other way. There is another thing, too.... Do you think it’s a little close in here, perhaps? May I open a window?”

She assented without speech, and he walked away with the step of his disability to the long windows. Into the dim great room stole the breath of the May morning, sweet with the fragrance of the balcony flowers.

The tall young man came walking back.

“There was one thing I wanted particularly to tell you. I sent Dal a message—a telegram—on Monday night....”

Startled, Carlisle looked up.

“On—*Monday*?... Why—I—”

“Not breaking your confidence, of course—just telling him, in a general way, to keep his courage up, that I—I thought good news was on the way.... It was without authority. I realized that. And yet I felt so sure that—when you had had a little time to think—that would be what you would wish. In fact, of course I knew it....”

Page 39

Their eyes met, almost for the first time, and a sudden constraint fell upon the girl.

“But I don’t see,” she said, with some difficulty—“if you telegraphed him that—on Monday—I don’t understand—”

“The telegram went astray. I went to the office here last night and had them find out. It should have reached Weymouth the first thing yesterday morning. It didn’t arrive till about three in the afternoon. But even then.... You see, he could hardly have expected a reply to his letter till Wednesday. That’s to-day—”

These two sat looking at each other: and Cally’s tongue was no longer free as a hurt child’s. She seemed not to find it possible to speak at all now. The young man from the other world was going on, with his strange composure.

“So you see how much was pure blind chance, that couldn’t be guarded against. If he had only waited.... If he had only trusted you—two hours longer....”

Surely he had more to say, much more; yet he ended abruptly, speech being evidently not desired of him. The girl had suddenly dropped her face into her hands.

Cally did not want to look at this man any more; could not bear it indeed. His eyes, which had always seemed gifted to convey hidden meanings, had well outstripped the words of his mouth, triumphing strangely over all that he knew about her. Quite clearly they had said to her just then: “*I* would have trusted you, you know....” And somehow that seemed sad to her, she did not know why. Why, indeed, should Jack Dalhousie have trusted her?...

Something moved in Cally in this moment which might have been the still small voice, and her weakness grew apace. She turned precipitately, put an arm on the back of the gold divan where she sat, and buried her face in it. Her struggle now was against tears; and it was to be a losing struggle. She did not cry easily. It always seemed rather like tearing loose something within her, something important that was meant to stay where it had been fixed. There was pain with these tears....

The man from the Dabney House said nothing. His was a more than woman’s intuition. There was a long silence in the drawing-room....

But after a time, when there were signs that the tension was relaxing and the sudden storm passing, he spoke in his simple voice:

“You see your message would have been all that you meant, but for the terrible coincidence. You mustn’t take it—so much upon yourself. That wouldn’t be right. Think of that poor girl out there, who is reproaching herself so to-day. And then, besides, you must know I realize that I should have seen you last week.... You had every right to expect that, as I was—in a measure—Dal’s representative....”

Cally hardly heard him.

Her back toward him, she had produced from some recess a small handkerchief, and was silently removing the traces of her tears. She had dimly supposed that there would be a long discussion; all at once it was clear that there was nothing to discuss. And she thought of Hugo, and a little of her mother, waiting upstairs....

Page 40

“It was too much for one person to carry alone,” continued the alien voice, sounding rather hard-pressed now. “I happened to be the one person in position to help, and I failed you.... I’d like you to know....”

But the girl had risen, ending his speech, her need to talk with him past. Her self-absorption was without pretence. Wan and white and with a redness about her misty dark eyes, she stood facing the old enemy, and spoke in a worn little voice:

“You said you’d see his father for me, didn’t you?”

The man, having risen with her, looked hurriedly away.

“Yes—of course. I’ll go. At once.”

And then, as if pledged to speak, though well he knew that she had no thought for him, he added abruptly: “But you mustn’t think of yourself as being alone with this. I promise you I’ll keep the knowledge, to punish me, that if—if I’d been the sort of man you needed, you’d have settled it all long ago....”

“That’s absurd....” said Cally, somehow touched, but with no conception of the depths from which he spoke.... “I never meant to tell at all if it hadn’t been for you.”

She added, seeing him turn away, looking around the long room: “I think you must have left it in the hall.”

And then, winking a little, she began to blow her nose, and moved away toward the door.

She encountered the butler, old Moses, entering from the hall. There was a yellow envelope upon his tray, though she had heard no ring at the bell.

“Excuse me, ma’am. This message just kem for you, an’ I signed for it at the do’.”

Carlisle thought instantly, Hugo!... And when, having quite forgotten the man standing silent behind her, she broke open the envelope with nervous fingers, the hope of her heart was at once confirmed:

> Am coming to you. Arrive four-ten this afternoon. Wait for me. H.C.H.C.

Did a tiny corner of her tightly closed mind open a little as she read? *Wait for me....*

She turned back to Jack Dalhousie’s representative with something like eagerness, to find his eyes fixed upon her.

“Oh!—would it do any harm to wait a little while, do you think?—just till this afternoon?”

“No, no,” he said, in rather an odd voice, “it will do no harm now.”

“Then I’ll send word to you this afternoon—at five or six o’clock,” said Cally, with vague flutterings of relief, of hope, perhaps. And then, moved by a sudden impulse, she added: “I will tell you why I want to wait. I am engaged to be married. I think I should tell my fiance, before anything is done....”

To this V. Vivian made no reply. He was advancing to the door. And then as he paused before the stricken Hun, and saw the glitter of a tear on the piquant gold-and-black lashes, the young man’s twisting heart seemed suddenly to loosen, and he said quite simply:

“Won’t you let me say how fine and brave a thing you’re doing, how splendid a—”

Page 41

"Don't!" said Cally, recoiling instantly from she knew not what. "*Don't!*... I'm not brave—-*at all!* Oh, no—that's just it...."

And then, looking down, she added somewhat pitifully: "But I really didn't mean to do anything so bad...."

The alien turned hurriedly away. He went without another word.

The front door shut upon him. And Cally gave a little jump, hearing above her the imperious tread of her mother.

XXI

That Day at the Beach, as we sit and look back at it; how
Hugo journeys to shield his Love from Harm, and Small
Beginnings can end with Uproars and a Proverb.

Canning arrived at the House of Heth shortly after four. He had had an all-day journey in summer heat, and a bad night preceding. In the still watches following his ladies' departure from New York, he had had time for calm reflection, nothing else but time; and the more he calmly reflected, the less could he understand his betrothed's singular desire to pay this tribute to the dead. The thing grew increasingly mystifying; increasingly unorthodox and undependable, too. Moreover, the second thought reproached him that, Carlisle being so greatly upset, however unreasonably, he himself should have accompanied her homeward, in her most need to go by her side. And thinking these things, the disturbed young man had tumbled out of bed in the small hours, to make inquiries regarding trains.

He was received at the House by his future mother-in-law, who was once more the accredited intermediary. Canning was hot, sooty, and suffering from want of sleep. There were cinders down the back of his neck. Mrs. Heth had Moses prepare for him a long iced drink, with rime on the glass and fragrant mint atop. And then, as the prize of her lifetime sat and sipped, she seated herself beside him, her strong voice trembling....

All hope of discreet reticence was now ripped to shreds. What chance remained of rescuing the name of Heth from the scandalous horrors of a suicide lay all in arousing this stalwart man to the imminence of the common peril. Mrs. Heth, somersaulting without hesitancy from last night's caution, flooded the dark places with lurid light.

Canning listened with consternation and chagrin. His moral sensibilities, indeed, received no particular shock, since Mrs. Heth's narrative frankly disclaimed any wrong-doing on Carlisle's part, but attributed the misunderstanding to the excited gossip at the time. And by the same token, he was not unduly perturbed over the girl's hysterical ideas of her present duty. What struck Canning most sharply, indeed, since he was

human, was the personal side of the matter: the stark fact that important developments touching Carlisle's name and happiness had been running along for some time, wholly without his knowledge, but under the direct personal superintendency of another man, this Mr. Somebody's unknown friend. So extraordinary a course of behavior seemed to reveal a totally new side of his betrothed, hitherto unsuspected. Canning would have been too saintly for this earth if he had not learned of these proceedings with the deepest surprise and vexation.

Page 42

And yet—what of it? Of course there was some simple and natural explanation, which she would give when she felt better able. Doubtless she had been threatened; blackmailed perhaps. And meantime the light thrown directly and indirectly on Carlisle's distraught mood touched the lover deeply. He hardly needed Mrs. Heth's frightened hints about the necessity of gentleness with firmness in dealing with a flare-up. Had he himself not known the wilful nature of her spirit in excitement, that never-forgotten evening in the library?

And when the striker of the right note withdrew at last, and Carlisle herself appeared in the drawing-room, very white and subdued, the last remnant of a personal grievance vanished from Canning's manner. Nothing could have exceeded the tenderness of his greeting....

"Did my telegram surprise you?" he said presently. "I got so troubled about you after you were gone.... I couldn't bear to leave you alone with this...."

And Cally said, with a quiver in her voice: "Oh, Hugo!... If you only knew how I've wanted you to-day!..."

She meant it with every fibre of her being. Doubly he had convinced her now that he could never be shocked or disgusted with her, that in him a perfect sympathy enfolded her, covering all mistakes. That he might not understand quite yet how she felt about everything was possible, but that was nothing now, by the fact that he understood *her*, at any rate, as mamma never could.

Some discussion of the matter was of course necessary. And presently, after they had talked a little, quite naturally, of his journey and how she had slept last night, the lovers drifted on into Mr. Heth's little study, reopened against this need.

Here they sat down and began to talk. And here, in five minutes, Carlisle's heart began mysteriously to sink within her....

She had been going through a series of violent emotional experiences in which he had had not the slightest share, and now required of him that he should catch up with the results of these experiences, upon a moment's notice and at a single bound. She could not realize the extreme difficulty of this feat. Nor, indeed, could Canning himself, confident by the ease with which his love had appeared to put down all personal irritations. To his seeming, as to hers, they had met in perfect spiritual reunion.

Accordingly, when he proposed that the matter be allowed to rest quiet for a day or two, till they were all in a little better frame of mind to view it calmly, he offered a temporary solution which he felt certain would seem to her as reasonable and as tactfully considerate as it did to him.

“In this moment of shock and distress,” he said, with admirable restraint, “you are not quite in the best frame of mind, you see, to decide such a serious matter. Fortunately, to wait a little while and think it over quietly can do no harm to anybody now. And then, if you still feel the same way about it, of course I shall want to do what you wish.”

Page 43

He had had Carlisle's feelings only at second-hand, through a medium perhaps wanting in transparence. Her hesitancy considerably surprised him. To Carlisle, as was almost equally inevitable, it was as if in the solid rock of their mutual understanding there had suddenly appeared a tiny crack. She felt the reasonableness as well as the tenderness with which Hugo spoke; she wanted nothing in the world but to do what he wanted. And yet it seemed somehow a physical impossibility for her now to say that she would unsettle and postpone it all,—something, say, as if Hugo had asked her to step back into last year or the year before. And she tried to make him understand this, saying—-what seemed a feeble reply to his logic:

"You see, I—I've already thought about it a good deal, Hugo ... And putting it off would only make me—miserable and ill. I can't explain very well.... I think I could begin to—to forget about it if—when...."

This she said over several times, in different ways, as the necessary discussion proceeded....

It was naturally hard for Hugo to grasp the grounds on which she rejected a mere deferment of painful discussion till to-morrow morning (for he reduced his proposal to that), or even to see why, though opposed herself, she would not readily be guided in so small a matter by his wishes. The soft chimes in the hall had rung five before it definitely came over him that the preliminaries had oddly, indeed incredibly, gone against him.

He faced the fact frankly, without perceptible sign of annoyance.

"Well, then, my dearest girl, I'm afraid we shall have to talk about it a little now...."

They sat side by side on papa's faded old lounge, where they had spent many an hour together in happier days. Canning held Carlisle's hand in a reassuring grasp. Her heart warmed to him anew: if he did not quite seem to understand—what wonder when she hardly did herself?—his was a love that drew its roots deeper than understanding. Nevertheless she flinched from a discussion which promised to be carried on chiefly by her over-strung nerves; and all at once she felt that she must know instantly what threatened, exactly what he thought about it.

"Hugo ... do you—don't you think I—I ought to tell?"

Far readier and surer was his voice in reply: "Frankly, darling, I can't as yet see any necessity."

How could he possibly see?—Ought to tell what? Had not her mother told him that he had to deal with the nightmare illusions of a disordered mind?...

Canning added with great considerateness: “I’ve thought it all over from every point of view—and you know I’m better able to think dispassionately to-day than you are—and I simply can’t persuade myself that we have any such obligation.”

Carlisle thought, with a little hopeful leap, that Hugo *must* know. It was all irrevocably settled; and yet at the same time it may have been that, woman-wise, she had left ajar a little door somewhere, through which his man’s wisdom might yet storm, and possess all....

Page 44

“But—but doesn’t it seem that if I—did him a wrong, I ought to be willing to set it straight?”

“Well, naturally!” said Canning, and smiled a little, sadly, to see how white and sorrowful-eyed she looked. “If you did him a wrong. But that’s just the point. I’m afraid I can’t agree with the somewhat extreme view this friend of the poor fellow’s seems to have put forward.... By the way,” he added, finding the natural question popping in so suitably here, “who is this man that has talked with you about it, Carlisle? Your mother didn’t go into particulars.”

Carlisle felt some surprise. “Oh—I supposed she told you. Dr. Vivian—you remember—who ...”

The name took Canning completely aback.

“Vivian?—no!... *That* chap!...”

Both remembered in the same moment his quizzical complaint that this man was his hoodoo. Both felt that the pleasantry had a somewhat gritty flavor just now.

“I hadn’t thought of him,” said Canning, at once putting down his surprise and explaining it, “because I didn’t think you knew him at all. In fact, I didn’t know you’d ever seen him but once, or perhaps twice....”

Carlisle regretted that mamma had not explained all this. “I haven’t more than three or four times.... Twice when I was with you, you remember, and then I met him again at Mr. Beirne’s and the Cooneys’—some cousins of mine. You see—he was a great friend of—his....”

“And I suppose he has worried you about this every time he got anywhere near you?”

“No,” Carlisle answered, laboriously, “I don’t think he has ever mentioned it—since the first. Of course I’ve had hardly any conversation with him—and it’s always been about the Works. You know, I told you he usually talked to me about that—”

He said that he remembered; and each was then aware that the harmony of a moment ago had somehow slipped away from them. Canning, indeed, instead of being enlightened by the explanation, was more bewildered than ever. How could it be that this man, her father’s assailant in the newspapers, the religious fellow whom Carlisle had never mentioned but to belittle, should have been the recipient of intimate confidences which she had withheld from him, her future husband? Naturally he could not understand in the least. However, glancing at her still face, he forbore to put another question.

“Well, that’s got nothing to do with it anyway,” he said, lightly, dismissing the side-issue. “Now, let’s see.... Sit back comfortably, my dear, and we’ll take it all quietly from the beginning....”

Hugo had got his facts from Mrs. Heth, and nothing had happened yet to suggest that they were in any way inaccurate. On the contrary, they seemed to have received subtle moral corroboration, so instinctive was it for the lover to lean backward from the views foisted upon Carlisle by her singular and religious confidant. That he himself was capable of coloring the case, attorney-wise, to suit the common interest did not really cross his mind.

Page 45

The whole issue in the singular muddle, he pointed out, seemed to be whether or not the poor fellow had known that the boat was upset. Well, who could say what he knew, an intoxicated man in a blind passion? Not Carlisle, certainly, plunged suddenly into the sea and intensely occupied with saving her life. How, for instance, could she know it if, in the instant when she was under water, the man had glanced back and—deadened by his drunken anger, admit that for him—had not returned for her? Of the dozens of people who had witnessed the disaster, not one had doubted that the unfortunate chap's desertion of her had been deliberate.... However, imagine that it hadn't been, exactly, imagine that the women in their excitement and resentment, and through misunderstanding of each other's statements, had failed to give him the full benefit of the doubt. It was still a great mistake to assume that what they had said or left unsaid had been decisive. Public opinion, knowing the unstable character of the man, had already judged him. Did his later life and behavior indicate, really, that that judgment was far wrong? And as to that night of excitement long ago, the world's rough-and-ready justice would hardly have taken much account of Carlisle's generous theory that perhaps the man didn't know what he was doing. By the same token, it would scarcely reopen the case now to admit that kind conjecture....

"I honor from the bottom of my heart, Carlisle," said Canning, "your wish to do the strictest justice. Need I say that I'm with you there, against the world? But what is the strictest justice? Perhaps you might bring a ray of relief to the poor man's father, and that's all. Is that really so great an object to move heaven and earth for, at the cost of much pain and distress to all who love you?..."

Having spoken at some length, Canning paused for a reply. The pause ran longer than he found encouraging. However, he was no more sensitive to it, to Carlisle's strange unresponsiveness as he talked, than was the girl herself. Indeed, it tore Cally's heart to seem to oppose her lover, pleading so strongly and sweetly for her against herself. Yet she had several times been tempted to interrupt him, so clear did it seem to her that he did not understand even now all that she had supposed was fully plain to him last night.

She said with marked nervousness, and a kind of eagerness, too: "You're so good and dear in the way you look at it, Hugo. You don't know—how sweet.... But it all comes down to whether he knew—doesn't it—just as you said. Well, you see I really *know* he didn't—"

"You're mistaken there, my dear! Only God Almighty knows that. Don't you think we had better leave the judgment to him?"

That Canning spoke quite patiently was a great credit to his self-control. His failure to move her had filled him with a depressing and mortifying surprise. To say nothing of the regard she might be supposed to have for his wishes, he knew that he had spoken unanswerably.

Page 46

“But you see—I really do know he wasn’t such a coward, Hugo,” said Carlisle, with the same nervous eagerness to accuse herself. “I—I knew him quite well—at one time. He was a wonderful swimmer, never afraid.... Perhaps it’s only a feeling—but, indeed, I *know* he wouldn’t have swum off and left me—if—”

“My dear girl, if you were really so certain of that, why didn’t you say so at the time?”

Carlisle, looking at the floor, said wistfully: “If I only had....”

She was acutely aware that his question carried a new tone into the discussion, that Hugo had criticised her for the first time. The tiny crack in their perfect understanding yawned suddenly wider. And distressed, and pitifully conscious that it was all her fault, Cally flung herself instinctively across the breach. Her gaze still lowered, she took Hugo’s hand and pressed it to her smooth cheek: an endearing thing, and done with a muteness more touching than any speech.

Canning was moved. She was not demonstrative by habit. He kissed the cheek, for once almost as if she were a child. And he said that of course she would have said so that night, except that she hadn’t really been certain of anything of the sort then. That feeling came now, born of excessive sympathy and nervous shock. The mistake would be to accept these feelings for her final judgment on such a very complicated and serious matter.

So he was arguing the case for postponement of discussion once more, with excellent good sense and an even more moving insistence....

If he had now but ceased his argument, turned, gathered her to his arms, and adjured her by his overflowing love to entrust herself to him, it is possible that within two minutes he might have had her weeping on his breast, in complete surrender. Body and soul, she was sore with much pounding: more than an hour ago, she needed sympathy and comfort now, loverly occupation of the desolating lonely places within her. But Canning argued, seeing nothing else to do, argued with a deepening note of patience in his voice. And when he stopped at length, it was natural that she should argue back: though she really meant this for her last attempt to convey the dim light that was in her.

“I hate to seem so silly and obstinate, Hugo. I—I can’t seem to explain it exactly. But I really don’t think that waiting would make any difference—in my feeling. And don’t you think, if I feel I ... couldn’t be happy till I—got this off my mind....”

Again he explained that this feeling was but a passing illusion, here to-day, gone to-morrow.

Carlisle hesitated. But Canning, seeing only silence for his pains, said with a little quickening of his tone:

“Tell me, my dear! Honestly, would such a thought as that—about your happiness—-ever have occurred to you if it hadn’t been suggested to you by Dr. Vivian?”

Natural as the inquiry was to Canning, it jangled oddly upon Carlisle. She could not understand Hugo’s recurrence to this man; it seemed curiously unreasonable, quite unlike him and somehow quite unjust....

Page 47

“Why, I don’t know, Hugo. I—I seem to have had it on my mind a good deal lately. Perhaps he first made me think of it that way—I don’t know.”

“Don’t you think perhaps we might have understood each other a little better all along, if you had talked it over with me before you talked to him about it?”

“Yes, I do now. I didn’t seem to think.... It all happened so unexpectedly—I never planned anything at all. And then I thought—I hoped—you would think I was doing right.”

“My dear girl, nobody in his senses could possibly think you were doing right, and nobody who cared for you could want you to abandon yourself to the impulses of a moment of nervous hysteria.”

He rose and paced the floor, four paces to the room. A handsome and impressive figure of a man he looked, his hands rammed into the pockets of his beautiful blue-flannel coat, his fine brow wrinkled with a responsible frown. He was seven years older than Carlisle, and, in the absence of Mr. Heth (whom neither telephone nor telegraph, prayer nor fasting, had yet been able to reach), he stood as her lawful protector and the man of her family. He must save her from the effects of her own hysterical moment, or nobody would. Clearer and clearer it had grown that he had to do with a distracted creature who, in a state of shock, had somehow passed under the influence of a man of the unscrupulous revivalist type, and upon whom, in her present mood, all reasoning was thrown away. Gentleness and firmness were the notes for dealing with a flare-up. Well, gentleness had been tried in vain....

Carlisle looked at Canning as he paced, in the grip of a heart-sick fear. The same comfortable, homely little room, with tight-closed door; the same evening sunshine filtering in across the faded carpet; the same situation, the same man and woman. But what was this new shape that peeped at her from behind the familiar objects? A delusion and a snare had been her first feeling of perfect unity. But was it conceivable that she and Hugo might *quarrel?*...

That was the one thing that could not be borne; anything to avoid that. She must give him his way, since he would not give her hers. She must agree to put it off till to-morrow, and then to-morrow he would still think she was unreasonable, and so they would put it off again, forever. She thought of Jack Dalhousie, lying on his back, but with open eyes which did not cease to question her; of poor Dr. Vivian, even now awaiting her word with trusting eyes which did not question anything; and she saw that to turn back now would be like a physical fracture somehow, like breaking her leg, and that the moment she had said she would, she would have to cry again, and afterwards she would be quite sick. And then she looked at Hugo, who was so manly and sure, who *must* be right, no matter how she felt now: and so began to nerve herself to speak....

But Canning had a new thought, a new argument, which now became definite. Coming to a halt in front of her, he said in a businesslike sort of way:

Page 48

“Let’s see now. You want to send word to Dr. Vivian this afternoon that he is to tell Colonel Dalhousie that you feel you did his son an injustice. Is that it?”

Checked in her drift toward yielding, Carlisle said that was what she had thought.

“Well, let’s imagine what would happen then. I said just now that for you to do this would accomplish nothing, but it would of course raise a cloud of doubt, of which the Colonel would probably make the very most. He would not be so scrupulous about giving you the benefit of the doubt as you feel, at the moment, about giving it to his son. He could make a most unpleasant story of it.”

Carlisle sat with lowered eyes, listening to the firm just tones. Very lovely and desirable she looked in a “little” white dress which Hugo had praised once....

“And malice would seize on this story and make it worse and worse the further it travelled. If you stop to think a moment, you will easily see what a sensation the scandalmongers can make out of the materials you ingenuously wish to offer them.”

He himself stopped to think; his keen mind flung out little exploring parties over the prospect he hinted at, and they raced back shrieking with vulgar horrors. Surely, surely his chosen bride could never have contemplated this.

“Carlisle, have you reflected that you would be pointed at, whispered about, till the longest day you live?”

She sat motionless, with averted face, and felt that she was slipping from her last mooring. Was it conceivable that Hugo was persuading her to hush it all up again—just because it was *easier?*... She and mamma had done that and thought nothing of it. But, for this moment, at least, it seemed horribly different to have such a thought about Hugo....

She said in a little voice: “But if it’s right, I oughtn’t to think about consequences, ought I?”

Canning groaned.

“How many times must I tell you that it’s not right, that it’s preposterous, that you yourself will say so to-morrow!...”

She made no reply, and then Canning, goaded on by his sense of strange impotence, spoke the depths of his secret resentment:

“Really, I should have thought that the views of your future husband would have more weight with you than those of a casual medical missionary, known to be irresponsible and untrustworthy.”

Cally gave him a look full of young reproach, rose with nervous purposelessness, and went over to the empty hearthside. Much nearer now peeped that startling shape. She leaned upon the mantel and tried to think: of her duty to Hugo, of how natural it was that he shouldn't understand, of how all this had begun. But unhappily the tone of his last remark seemed to have set other chords quivering within her, and all that she seemed able to think of was that it was cruelly unjust for him to misjudge her so. He had promised to stand by her no matter what happened, and besides Dr. Vivian wasn't irresponsible and untrustworthy. The wild thought knocked that Hugo, now that he knew the truth about her, had ceased to love her....

Page 49

“Carlisle,” said Canning, with more restraint, “isn’t it reasonable for me to think that?”

Her reply showed some signs of agitation: “Why, Hugo—of course ... You must know your views have all the weight in the world with me. His have none ...”

He came up to her on the hearthstone, raised her hand, and kissed the little pink palm.

“Never mind—I’m sure that’s true.... Now, my dear, we seem unable to understand each other to-day, and trying to do so only throws us farther and farther apart. We both need rest, and time for quiet thought. You must let me decide this point for you. I am going to send word to Dr. Vivian now that you will let him hear from you to-morrow morning.”

He released her hand, and turned decisively away. At that moment, the dim hall chimes began to strike six.

“Oh, no, Hugo! Please don’t,” she broke out, taking a little step after him.... “*Please!* I don’t think I could bear it....”

Canning wheeled instantly, his virile face darkening and flushing.

“You don’t?... My views don’t seem to matter so tremendously, after all!”

“Ah, Hugo dear! That hurts. How—”

“Tell me, Carlisle, did the idea of telling Colonel Dalhousie, for your happiness, originate with you or with this man?”

Touched once more in her spirit by his singular obsession, she replied, with constraint: “I don’t remember, Hugo. Perhaps with him. But it wasn’t his saying so that made it true. It is the way I feel ...”

“That brings us back to the beginning again. I have done my best to persuade you that this feeling is an hallucination.”

Over and over this ground they went with quickening exchanges, Canning’s patience wearing sharper at each circuit, Carlisle growing steadily whiter, but unluckily not more yielding. At last Canning said:

“You are going to trust your whole future life to me, Carlisle. It is hard for me to grasp that you refuse to trust me in this, the first thing I have ever asked of you. Tell me plainly that you mean to have no regard for my wishes.”

Carlisle felt ready to scream. How had this miserable misunderstanding arisen? What was it all about? Her mind glanced back, but she could not remember, could not begin

to retrace the bewildering steps. Worse yet, she hardly seemed to want to now, for Hugo could not possibly speak to her in this way if he loved her as he had said.

She said in a small, chilled voice: “That’s unjust, Hugo. I have every regard—”

“So you say, Carlisle. But nothing else that you say supports it in the slightest.”

The girl made no reply. And then Canning struck out:

“My entreaties carry no weight with you, it seems. Well, then I forbid you.”

For the first time a tinge of color touched Carlisle’s cheek.

“You forbid me?”

He had no sooner said the words than he regretted them. In the beginning nothing of this sort had been within his dreams; had he foreseen the possibility, it is probable that he would have given Carlisle her head at the start without argument. But, once the position taken, he could not bend back his pride to recede. And to him, too, came prodding thoughts, of a bride who was revealing strange sides of her nature, strange unlovelinesses....

Page 50

“Good God!” broke from him. “With such excessive consideration for *two* other men, haven’t you an atom for the man you are to marry? Hasn’t it occurred to you that in a matter seriously involving my life as well as yours, I have a claim, a joint authority with yourself?”

“Occurred to me? It has never been out of my mind.”

“Yet you resent it, it seems. I say that I forbid your doing something so full of painful consequences to us both, and you show that you resent it ... Don’t you?”

“It’s a surprise to me that you would want to use your authority in such a way. But—”

“Then you must have failed to grasp that this act of folly you contemplate, over my entreaty and command, would bring an entirely new element into the situation ...”

Carlisle looked at him without shrinking now. “A new element into the situation? I don’t understand. How do you mean?”

“Carlisle! Be frank! You know the effects of all this. Have you the right, when I have sought one girl for my wife, to offer me quite another?”

Pink deepened on the girl’s cheek.

“I don’t think I have.... Well, Hugo, you are free....”

“*Don’t say that!"* cried Canning, in a voice thick with a chaos of feeling. “It’s unendurable ...”

He turned abruptly away.

Of the two, in that disruptive moment, Canning was far the more visibly perturbed. If women think with their emotions, Carlisle’s emotions, rebelling at long overstrain, had now run away with her. She was never a docile girl, as her mother well knew. To Canning she had dealt the ultimate unbelievable buffet. Through all her incredible obstinacy, through all his knowledge of the capabilities of her spirit, he had hardly doubted that one hint of betrothal restiveness would be sufficient to bring her to her knees. Now he seemed to wear her words like a frontlet, branded in the mantling scarlet of his brow. The young man felt himself falling through space....

The same familiar little room, but now with a new face. Twilight began to steal into it. On the cheerless hearthside, the lovers stood, and each knew that words once spoken live forever. And looking at each other’s faces each knew, and could not change it, that the lover was not uppermost in them now. They were two human beings spent with long arguing, two wills hopelessly at the clash.

In the sudden break-up of the trusted and reliable, Canning's polished style had been torn from him. He owned, laboriously and at some length, that this serious disagreement between them was terribly disturbing to him. How would it be later, if she refused now to show any regard for his urgent requests? Was it unreasonable for him to expect his chosen wife to consider the responsibilities entailed by his name and position, to share his ambition to hold both above the stings of malice and unmerited scandal?

At another moment, both the manner and matter of Hugo's remarks would have touched Carlisle profoundly. But she was beyond thinking of Hugo now. All that her fluttering heart could feel was that when he had promised to stand by her through all time, he had meant only to stand by her as long as she did everything as he told her....

Page 51

“No, Hugo, it is reasonable. That is what I say. I am unreasonable. I don’t seem able to help it to-day.”

And Hugo, with the last remnant of his unconquerable incredulities, for the twentieth time mentioned another day. A post-mortem flicker of reargument started: started, but went out, quickly extinguished by the perilous fascination of the personal. Unspoken thoughts pressed in upon them as they circled, lifelessly reiterating. These thoughts grew rapidly louder; and Canning, striving to keep his bitter hostility from his tone, gave voice:

“Of course the truth is—though I am sure you don’t realize it yourself—this man has somehow got you under his influence ... A sort of moral hypnosis ... to compel you to do what is against your nature ... and will bring you great harm.”

At what conceivable point had the grounds of discussion become so completely metamorphosed?

“No, that isn’t true. I’m not doing—”

“I suggest that in your interest ... Otherwise I should be unable to account for the predominant part you have allowed him to play in this.”

“And yet, Hugo, he was right in saying that I couldn’t be happy if I didn’t tell the truth. And you don’t understand that even now.”

“I fear I’ve always been dull at these camp-meeting metaphors.”

Now they had struck the greased road, and easy was the descent to Avernus. Carlisle said, all weakness gone from her:

“Well, I don’t ask you to understand any more. You feel that I’m not the same girl—”

“I didn’t say that! I asked ... if you had the right—now—to make yourself a—different girl. By that—”

“I’m afraid I’ve already made myself a different girl from what you thought. You knew that when mamma told you what I had done....”

Why couldn’t he say that he wanted her twenty times over, no matter what she had done? It would have been easy to say that half an hour ago. Canning’s reply was: “I’ve said again and again that you’ve done nothing. All this malicious scandal cannot touch you unless you yourself wilfully start it.”

“You seem to care less about what I am, than about what people might think I am. And yet,” she added, her hand upon her heart and her breath coming quicker and quicker, “you wonder that I let somebody else tell me what I am.”

The deliberate reference to the revivalist fellow stung Canning like the flick of a glove in his face.

“Dr. Vivian? He has not my disadvantage of laboring to save his affianced’s name from everlasting disgrace.”

“Perhaps he doesn’t find disgrace where you seem to look for it.”

“It is cheap to be prodigal with other men’s belongings. What is this man to you?”

“Hugo!—Hugo!” broke from her. “I can’t bear this!... You must leave me.”

“If I go,” said Canning, trembling, “I do not return.”

“It is what I wish,” said Carlisle.

Page 52

And her other hand came to her heart, to his glittering pledge upon her finger....

Canning stood watching her, paling and purpling. How they had come to this he knew no more than Carlisle; and no more than she could he force his steps backward. In truth, the deeps of him had never so passionately desired her as now, yearning beyond reason or understanding to the untamed spirit. And yet ... What did he know of her, whom he thought he knew so well? She had flirted with a young drunkard, fraternized with a low crank, inextricably involved herself in the scandals of a suicide. Taxed with these things, she was wantonly rebellious, contemptuously indifferent to his wishes. Lovely and wild she stood there. And yet ...

He heard his hoarse voice saying: "Think, Carlisle. You are sure that this is what you wish ..."

"You leave me no alternative."

"Oh, but I have ... I do."

"Not one that I can accept."

"Then you force me to say good-bye."

"Good-bye."

His legs could not have heard the marching-order; he remained rooted where he stood. Ebbings and flowings of color mottled his handsome face.

"One last word ... Is it to come to this? We stand ... at the final parting of the ways. Think ... This is what you wish?"

If he still hoped for impossible reconciliation, or if merely some instinct moved him to put the burden for the breaking upon her, Carlisle did not know. She was past arguing now.

"This is yours."

On the pink palm he had kissed such a little while ago she held out the glorious diamond he had given her in the first radiance of the engagement. Canning saw no way of escaping the offering; he accepted it with a stiff bow, dropped it in the pocket of his coat. But it was a business to which even he quite failed to impart any dignity.

He looked blindly about for his hat and stick, remembered that he had left them outside, turned and faced his love again. Between them passed a long look.

"Then ... this is good-bye."

“Good-bye,” said Cally again.

And then Hugo opened the door of papa’s study and went away. And in a moment there was the sound of the front door shutting.

Was it over, then? Was the parting of lovers so brief, so final?...

Cally started, as from a trance. She ran out of the study and through the dark library to the drawing-room and the front windows. Just in time, she stood behind the curtains, and caught a last glimpse of Canning’s receding back. Brave and dear it looked, departing.

Over and over she said to herself: “He’s gone ... Hugo’s gone ... He has thrown me over ...”

Gone was the prince of lovers. Calamity fell upon calamity. It would be better to be dead. And suddenly all that was hard and resisting in the girl broke with the taut strain, broke with a poignant bodily throe, and she fell face downward into a great chair, weeping with wild abandon.

Page 53

Here, within two minutes from the shutting of the door, her mother found her.

* * * * *

So the beginning at the Beach touched its farther end. It touched with the shocks of cataclysm, whose echoes did not soon cease to reverberate. The word of the Lord came to Jack Dalhousie's father, and he would not suffer in silence. Mr. Heth arrived at the House at ten o'clock that night; it was the best he had been able to do, but it was too late for a family reunion by an hour. The two women had fled away to New York, probably on the very same train that bore back Hugo Canning. And behind them Rumor of the triple head had already risen, roaring an astonishment and a proverb.

XXII

One summer in the Old Hotel; of the World's wagging on, Kern Garland, and Prince Serge Suits; of how Kern leaves the Works for Good and has a Dream about Mr. V.V.'s Beautiful Lady; of how Mr. V.V. came to sit in the still Watches and think again of John the Baptist.

And still the world wagged on.

Calamity befell one House out of many, and the natural cycles did not stir a hair's breadth. The evening and the morning were another day, and another and another. May ran indifferent out, with blue skies and a maddening sequence of "Continued Heat." Then presently the long days had reached their length, loitered awhile, turned slowly backward. And June had become July, and midsummer lay fast over the half-empty town.

It was a summer that broke records for heat, and those fled from it who could. But in the industrious backwaters of towns, where steady work means steady bread, it is the custom of men to take the climate as it comes to them, freezing or sweating at the weather-man's desire. Mountain and ocean, awninged gardens and breeze-swept deck: those solaces are not for these. Ninety Fahrenheit it ran and over, day after day, half of June, half of July. But in the old Dabney House Mrs. Garland stood on by the steaming wash-tubs, and Kern fared daily to the bunching-room at Heth's and its air like the breath of a new bake-oven, and Vivian, the doctor, was never "on his vacation" when his sick called, and stout Mr. Goldnagel, week on week, mopped his bald Hebraic head and repaired while you waited, with all work strictly guaranteed.

Of these four it was the young physician who kept the busiest, for his work never ended. Falling back from his brief appearance in the upper world, he had been speedily swallowed again by his own environment. Routine flattened him out as never before; the problem of life was to find time to sleep.

For one thing, there was a mild epidemic of typhoid this summer, breaking out in those quarters of the town where moderate conveniences (as Mrs. Garland called them) were matters of hearsay only, and the efficient and undermanned Health Department, fighting hard, did not have the law to drive home orders where they would do the most good. But the doctor of the Dabney House needed no epidemic to keep him occupied, so acceptable was his no-bill custom—still maintained—to the unwell laity of the vicinage. Through the dingy waiting-room, old state bedchamber, there rolled a waxing stream, and the visiting rounds of V. Vivian, M.D., ran long and overlong.

Page 54

Had these been pay patients, carriage trade, Receipts would have soared dizzily in these days, and handsome additions might have been made to that Beirne residue of fifteen thousand dollars, now lying useless, not even at three per centum, in Mr. Heth's Fourth National Bank. But here trooped only the unworthy with unworthy troubles, not always of the body; the poor and the sinful with their acute complaints; waiters and day-laborers and furtive sisters in sorry finery, plumbers' helpers with broken heads, bankrupt washerwomen, married grocer's clerks with coughs not destined to stop. To these through the sweltering days and nights, young Dr. Vivian ministered according to his gifts. They took his pills, his bottles and his "treatment"; they lauded but rarely took his moral counsel; and not a few spoke of loans....

All July the old hotel rang with the blows of hammer and the rasp of saw, in preparation for its new birth in September, as the Union Settlement House. There came often, in the late afternoons, the Rev. George Dayne, the tireless and kind-faced Secretary of Charities, who wandered whistling over the lower floor, while his mind's eye saw, beyond the litter of boards and brick and demolished partitions, the emerging visage of a great institution. And Mr. Dayne rarely failed to climb the stairs for a little chat with the young man in the polished coat who, under promise of secrecy, had called these wonders into being.

More regular were the visits of Hon. Samuel O'Neill, desirous of talking over the state of the Union, particularly as touching the new advanced labor law he was now beginning to draft—"stiffest factory legislation ever passed in the South." And sometimes, when the condition of the sick permitted it, these two would slip away from the Dabney House for a welcome swim, with a growing swarm of boys behind; for Vivian had been the best swimmer on the river in his day, and still did things from the springboard which many lads with two sound feet could not copy. So diversion from the medical grind was not wanting. And once in June, the doctor lunched with Mr. Dayne at Berringer's, and twice he was dragged off to supper at the Cooneys' and enjoyed himself very much, and once he took Sunday dinner with his aunt, Mrs. Mason, and his little Mason cousins: only that time he was called away from the table before dessert, and got back to South Street just a minute before Mrs. Meeghan died....

The Garlands rarely saw their boarder now except at mealtimes, and by no means always then. Kern, for her part, was off to the Works at quarter to seven each morning, and had stopped coming home for dinner since the heat got so bad. However, the women observed him, and talked him over of nights as they washed the dishes in the new detached kitchen. For the Garland *menage* boasted this moderate convenience now, directly attributable to the remarkable growth of Receipts (voluntary) which had reached $21.75 by the book for the single month of June. It was agreed that Mr. V.V. was not so jokey at the supper-table as formerly, and looked po'ly, in fine, and no wonder, the heat and all, and the way he let Hazens and Epsteins roust him out of bed in the middle of his sleep.

Page 55

Kern deplored the doctor's thinness, and hardly less, in her secret heart, his strange indifference to his personal appearance. She observed to her mommer that she never see a gempman go so shabby. She longed to admonish Mr. V.V. on some of these matters, but on the whole hardly saw her way clear. However, it is possible to do a thing or two by indirection in this world, as one half the race has had gone reason to learn. And one sultry night in mid-July, the little buncher seemed able to talk of nothing but the astonishing suit Jem Noonan had just obtained at the One-Price Outfitting Company for the somewhat laughable sum of $7.90. A three-piece Prince serge, warranted fast, with the English shoulders and high-cut vest, which only last week had been $15, for Jem had seen it in the window with his own eyes, but had waited around, knowing that the Mid-Summer Stock Rejuicing Sales were now about due. Such a Chance Would Not Soon Occur Again: so it said on the card in the window, and so Didymus himself would have believed, hearing Kern Garland's abandoned eulogies....

And, sure enough, Mr. V.V., at length fired out of his purely civil interest, was visited with a brilliant association of ideas, as his eye betrayed. It was a matter, it will be remembered, which he had always meant to take up some day.

"Did you say the One-Price," he inquired, not without an inner sense of cleverness and enterprise, "or was it the Globe?"

Kern's heart thrilled. She was a woman, and hence the mother of all men. And this, of course, was the moment to introduce quite simply, the subject of the Genuine Mouldform Garments like the pixtures in the magazines, $15, rejuiced from as high as $28.50, and would look, oh, so fine and stylish long after the Prince serge had worn slick and faded....

"But I thought you spoke of the Prince as something especially fine," said Mr. V.V., with rather a long face for the way expenses seemed to be mounting up.

"Fine for on'y a carpenter, oh, yes," said Kern, "but not hardly what you'd recmend to a doctor, oh, no."

The young man said ruefully that perhaps he had better investigate the One-Price bargains, before Jem Noonan gobbled them all up. Then his eyes rested on Kern across the table, and the light of enterprise died out of them....

To take this child away from the Heth Works would be easy, indeed, but what to do with her then? That was a question which money could not answer. Kern's education had stopped at twelve. She was nineteen years old, born to work, and qualified to do nothing in the world but make cheroots.

After all, could anything more suitable happen to her than that she should take a fancy to Jem Noonan, the upstanding, square-jawed, taciturn youth who had appeared at the

Dabney House in his Sunday blacks one night in May, and had reappeared regularly once a week since? Noonan was master of his trade at twenty-one, a lodge man, an attendant at ward meetings, and laying by money to embark as a contractor; he bade fair to be a power some day. And, though he seemed to be almost completely dumb, there must be something uncommon in him that he should be so drawn to the gay, dreaming little creature who was so clearly made of other clay than his....

Page 56

“I haven’t seen Jem for some time,” said the doctor aloud, casually. “How are you and he getting on these days?”

Kern gave an impish little exclamation: she never liked for Mr. V.V. to mention Jem.

“Him and me mostly get off!... Him and *I* mostly get off....”

And then she giggled briefly, and sprang up with eyes too bright and went skipping and kicking for the detached kitchen to see if there was any hot lightbread.

But she flung over her shoulder as she vanished: “Jem he lacks ’magination....”

Returning with rolls, the small diplomat reverted to the question of the Mouldform Garment, which, it seemed to be settled, Mr. V.V. was to purchase on the morrow. Kern’s endeavor was to convey the idea that, in cases such as this, many men ever made it a practice to keep the old suit by, like for rainy days, and under no circumstances to give it away to the first person comes along and asts them for it. Clearly the reference here was to her father, the erring Mister, who had appeared at the Dabney House in June’s first blush and was now (it was presumable) wearing Mr. V.V.’s derby down many a sunny lane.

“And the shirts they got at the One-Price Company!” cooed Kern. “And the shoes!... Lor, them people’re givin’ away stock awmost!...”

However, Mr. V.V. did not purchase shoes and shirts next day, or even a Genuine Mouldform Garment. For that day was Tuesday, July 17th, the day when the professional mercury in the Government “kiosk” set its new record, which was like to stand for many years. One hundred and one it announced, not without a touch of pride; and that day Ours was the hottest city in the United States (some said in the world), and many private thermometers showed one hundred and four, five, and six. And on that day Corinne Garland wilted abruptly in the sickening heat, and her tall machine at the Heth Works stood silent after three P.M....

Kern came home and went to bed, and suddenly all the current of life in the Dabney House was changed. It was after five when Mr. V.V., returning from his rounds, heard the news, with a tightening feeling around his heart, and went down the long hall to see her.

The little girl lay silent, with feverish cheeks, and did not make a game of sticking out her tongue, which was certainly a bad symptom. However, Kern was sensitive with Mr. V.V.; she didn’t like to answer his questions, wouldn’t tell the truth in fact. It took a grizzled gentleman from the other end of town, Dr. Halstead, late physician to Mr. Armistead Beirne, to fix the diagnosis beyond doubt. Typhoid, said he, confirming the first impression of his learned young colleague. Kern Garland had typhoid.

Well, it wasn't her lungs, at any rate, objects of suspicion since the pleurisy in January. Only—only—how had she ever been allowed to stay on at the Works so long?...

The little girl had also a nervous constitution, hardly fitted for weathering many gales. So observed the grizzled visitor, aside. And, glancing about the poor room with its sway-backed double bed, he advised that she be sent off to a hospital without delay, and so smiled cheerily at the small patient and went chugging back to his handsome house on Washington Street, having pooh-poohed all mention of a fee.

Page 57

But Kern cried bitterly at the threat of a hospital, and Mr. V.V. instantly promised that she shouldn't stir a foot from where he was. He didn't mean that she should suffer by it, either. But it would be a strange thing if he, a resident physician with the riches of the world behind him (practically speaking), could not do all that a hospital could do, and perhaps that little more beside that might make all the difference....

There followed a day of intense activity, and at the end of that time—behold the power of money in the bank, so decried by transcendentalists.

Mrs. Garland slept alone in a new room containing the sway-backed double bed, and (to tell the truth) not one earthly thing besides. Kern slept in a brand-new single bed of white iron, new-mattressed and sheeted, and not far away stood another bed exactly like it. Beside Kern's bed stood a table holding glasses and bottled milk and thermometer and cracked ice and charts and liquid diet. In one of the windows stood three potted geraniums, growing nicely and bright red. Another window, where the noonday sun shone in too warmly, was fitted with a red-striped awning; and in a third—-for the pleasant old room, at the extreme back of the house, had no less than four of them—a baby electric fan, operated from a storage battery, ran musically hour by hour. And through all these marvels moved the biggest and most incredible marvel of all: a lady in a blue-and-white dress and long apron, with spectacles and a gentle voice, who was paid *twenty-five dollars a week* to wait upon and give sponge baths to her, Kern Garland.

Yes, you could do something with one thousand dollars put into a checking account, and fourteen thousand more waiting behind that on a certificate of deposit. But was it not the irony of life, was it not life itself, that the little buncher, who only the other day would have thrilled to her marrow at the mere thought of all these things, should have won her lady's glories only when she was too strangely listless to care for them?...

Mrs. Garland feebly protested against the doctor's staggering expenditures, as in duty bound, but was silenced when he told her that, by a lucky chance, he had a fund given him by a benevolent relative for just such cases. The doctor took advantage of the interview to announce a stiff raise in board-charges, saying, in quite a censorious way, that he had been expecting for some time to hear a demand from her for such an increase. As it was, through her failure to protect her own interests, she and Kern had been doing the full duties of an office-boy for him, doing them, he might say, faithfully and well, without compensation of any sort whatsoever. This imposition must cease at once.

"Again," said he, "I am growing—somewhat heartier. I am quite aware that I eat more. I say that thirty-five dollars a month, and probably more, is the proper amount for me to pay."

Page 58

And he said it so sternly, with such a superior gempman's way to him, that Mrs. Garland, feeling convicted of guilt,—and, to tell the truth, missing Kern's earnings sorely,—could only reply: "Just as you say, sir, well, now, and thank you kindly, I'm sure."

The first excitement gradually subsided, and the Dabney House settled to the long pull. Days slipped by, all just alike.

Kern's malady discouraged reading aloud. It discouraged conversation. Visitors were not allowed. But twice, without the nurse's knowledge,—Miss Masters took her rest-time every afternoon from three to seven,—rules were suspended to admit Miss Sadie Whirtle, of Baird & Himmel's,—an enormous, snapping, red-cheeked girl she proved to be, whose ample Semitic countenance gave a copious background for violet talcum, but who said nothing wittier in Vivian's hearing than "Very pleased to make your acquaintance, I'm sure"—and once to admit Miss Henrietta Cooney, of Saltman's bookstore. Hen came by from the store late one August afternoon, having heard something of the case which seemed to worry V.V. more than all his others put together. She was allowed to spend twenty minutes in the sick-room, provided she did not permit Kern to talk. Having faithfully obeyed these instructions, Henrietta returned to the office, where the doctor sat in his shirt-sleeves, humped over Miss Masters's chart.

"She's an odd little thing," said Hen, "very cute and dear with her staring eyes and her yes-ma'ams. I was telling her about the Thursday Germans, first explaining that a German had nothing to do with Germany—or has it? You know you told me she was wild about parties. She was so, so interested.... V.V., she's quite a sick girl, isn't she?"

"Quite sick," replied V.V. He glanced out of his weather-worn window, and said: "But she's going to be better to-morrow."

"Oh! That's the crisis, or whatever you call it?"

He answered by a nod, and Hen continued:

"She never belonged in the Works, and she certainly never belonged to that fat woman with the beak I met in the hall. She's a changeling—that's it. Speaking of the Works, V.V., I had quite a long letter from Cally Heth this week."

"Oh!" said V.V. "Oh, yes!—from Miss Heth. How is she?"

Hen, who had been strolling about the tall chamber and peeking into the instrument cabinet, noted the young man's guarded tone; and she wondered how many times V.V. and her cousin Cally had met, and what part he had played in all that affair, and in general what these two thought of each other.

“Well, she’s certainly in much better spirits than when I had the note from her in July. One thing, her answering my letters at all shows it. They’re in Switzerland now, at the National House, Lucerne, and J. Forsythe Avery has, turned up, which is a pretty good sign of the times, I should say. He’s a social barometer, you know,—the last man in the world to turn up where it would hurt his position, whatever it is. It wouldn’t surprise me a bit to hear some fine day that Mr. Canning had sneaked back, too, now that the worst is over, and wasn’t so very bad at that. There’s a man I’d like to have five minutes’ talk with,” said Henrietta Cooney. “I think I’d give him something to put in his memory-book.”

Page 59

Hen, having her own theory of events, gave a defiant tug to her new sailor-hat. She considered that she looked very nice to-day, and she did. She, too, had been patronizing the midsummer sales, and beside the sailor, she had on a new linen skirt which she had got for $1.75, though the original price-mark was still on it and said $5.

“Cally,” she continued, “wrote a good deal about her mother’s being dropped from the officers of the Associated Charities. Well it’s too bad, of course, but somebody’s got to take the blow, V.V., and I imagine it’s going about where it belongs. Serves her right, I say, for the sort of mother she’s always been, doing her best to educate all the decent feeling out of Cally, and then trying to break her when she was doing the best thing she ever did in her life. In fact—I don’t want to brag, but I expect the talk I’ve spread around town has had a good deal to do with the way things have gone. She married mother’s brother and all that,” said Hen, “but I detest and despise her and always have.”

V.V. burst out laughing, and Hen observed: “Well, I’m glad I said that. It’s the first smile I’ve seen from you this month.”

She stood by the old secretary, looking down at him, and she thought what a hard life he had down here, and how his face looked too refined for this so practical world....

“Now, V.V., really,” said she, “why can’t you leave your work to this man Finnegan for just a week and pack your little bag and run down to Aunt Rose Hopwood’s farmette—-really? Tee Wee and Loo are there, and everybody’ll be delighted to have you. In the open air all day, sleep ten hours every night, eat your blessed head off. No mosquitoes. No malaria—”

“I can’t go now, Hen. It’s impossible. Thank you just the same.”

He spoke quite irritably, for him, and Hen, having had this subject up more than once before, desisted and turned to go.

“Well, take some sort of care of yourself, V.V.,” she said from the door. “Don’t be a goose. And, by the way, be very gentle with your little friend Corinne. You know she thinks you put up the moon.”

V.V. had meant to be gentle with Corinne, but in the light of this remark he resolved to be gentler still. He sat for ten minutes in abstraction after Henrietta had gone; and then, rising abruptly, picked up the chart, went down the long hall, pushed aside the light green curtain that swung in front of a door, and passed into the sick-room.

Kern lay alone with her geraniums, awning, whirring fan, and other ladylike appurtenances. Mr. V.V. sat down by the white iron bed and introduced a thermometer into her mouth. He possessed himself of her wrist, took out his silver watch and presently wrote something on the chart. He took out the thermometer and again jotted

upon the chart. Then he gave the patient two tablespoonfuls of peptonoids. All this in silence. And then Kern said in a whimpering little voice:

Page 60

“Mr. V.V., I’m so *hongry*.”

“I know it, poor child. Just a little more patience now: you’re going to begin to get better right away, and before you know it you’ll be sitting down to the finest dinners that ever you popped into your mouth. Ring the bell and order what you like—stuff, stuff, stuff—-banquets all day long. And that reminds me,” said he, hurrying away from this too toothsome subject—“your holiday, as soon as you feel strong enough to travel. It’s high time we were making pretty definite plans about that. The question is, what sort of place do you think you’d like to go to?”

“Oh!... Do you mean—any place—go to *any* place I like?”

“Any place in the world,” replied Mr. V.V., the magnificent.

Kern thought for some time, her eyes on the window, and then said:

“I’d like to go to some place where there’s mountains and a sea.” She added, as if to soften the baldness of her specifications, the one word: “Like.”

Mr. V.V. thought of Marathon, which on the whole didn’t promise to suit. He was visited with an ingenious idea, *viz*.: that Kern should go to no less than two places on her convalescent tour, one containing Mountains, the other containing a Sea! And so it was settled to the general satisfaction....

“Only hurry up and get well,” said the tall doctor, “or you’ll find the crowds gone from Atlantic City before you get there.”

He had risen, but paused, looking down at the flushed little face in which the sunken dark eyes looked bigger than ever. Thoughts of himself were in his mind; and they were not pleasant thoughts.

“Kern,” said he—for he had by now fallen into the family habit, abandoning the too stately Corinne—“suppose you were absolutely well, and had a thousand dollars, what would you do for yourself with it?”

It was a game well calculated to interest the little girl even in the listlessness and apathy of fever. Kern spoke first of duck, of French fried potatoes and salads rich with mayonnaise; then, hurrying on with increasing eagerness, of taking a steamer to Europe and buying her and mommer Persian clo’es....

Her medical adviser was obliged to check these too exciting flights.

“I mean more as a—as an occupation,” he explained. “You know, of course, you’ve bunched your last cheroot. I was wondering what sort of nicer work you would like to fit yourself for—later on?”

Kern boggled a good deal over the answer to this, but finally got it out.

“What I’d truly like to be, Mr. V.V., if I could, is a writer, sort of.”

“Oh!... Yes, yes—a writer! Well, that’s very nice. A very nice occupation—writing.”

The child was encouraged to go on. Staring at him with her grave investigatory eyes, she said, quite timidly:

“Mr. V.V., do you think I could *ever* be an eppig poet, sir?... Like Homer the Blind Bard, y’ know?”

Page 61

Mr. V.V.'s encouraging smile became a little fixed. Yet there came nothing of a smirk into it, nothing the least bit superior.... Was this the explanation of the little girl's odd yearning toward pens and desks? How came she to revere the Bard, where even to hear his name? Was it possible that Mrs. Garland's changeling had a spark in her, a magic urging her on?...

"Epic poet, is it?" said he aloud, cheerily. "Oh, I daresay something of the sort can be arranged. No harm in having a try anyhow! First thing, of course, is to get a good education...."

And he spoke of the High School, when Kern got back from her trip, with a little brushing-up, first, perhaps, under his personal supervision....

And next morning, when Kern's temperature stood down a whole degree at nine o'clock, these great plans seemed to come nearer at a bound. That day the Dabney House drew a long breath and smiled. Miss Masters was even more confident than Vivian that the hard corner had been turned. So the verdict went to Hen Cooney, who telephoned from Saltman's; and so it went to Jem Noonan, who was to be found waiting in front of the Dabney House every evening in these days, silently biting a Heth Plantation Cheroot, which he smoked because Kern made them, though secretly preferring the White River brand, made by the Trust. A great capacity for waiting had Jem. And that was the afternoon also that Doctor mysteriously vanished from his office before four o'clock, having left no word where he could be reached with his office-boy, Mrs. Garland; and was still out when O'Neill called at quarter to six, to talk about his factory law....

Next day, these novel excitements continued. For when Corinne Garland first opened her eyes that morning, they fell at once upon an imagined wonder out of fairyland. There it stood close to her bed's head, shining gloriously in the early sun, looking, oh, so real.... Kern lay extremely still, gazing wide-eyed: for well she knew the way of dreams, how you forgot and moved a little, and then it all winked out. But after a time, when It did not stir or dance about at all, there came to her a desperate courage, and she stretched out a trembling little hand. And lo, the hand encountered a solid unmistakable. And then Kern gave a great gasping Oh, and sat up in bed; and presently, being very weak, she began to cry, she was so happy.

It really was the prettiest Writing-Desk in the world, a desk for a duchess's boudoir, all made of polished rosewood, and standing tall and graceful on four curving legs. It had an astounding lid, this Writing-Desk had; that you either locked up or let down; and when you let it down the lid had a shining slab of plate glass all screwed on, thus becoming the loveliest place to write on that you could well imagine. And the inside parts of the Desk were running over with delightful things, note-paper and envelopes, and pads and pencils, and new white blotting-paper and—true as true, dull black, with the cutest little silver belt—a beautiful Founting Pen. Inside also were pigeonholes of

the best quality, like in the Netiquette. And in one of the pigeonholes there lay, sure enough, a note; not, indeed, from a mustached count with a neyeglass, but from one who perhaps seemed not less of the purple to the fevered little buncher.

Page 62

This note was written in the best jokey vein throughout, beginning, “Miss Corinne Garland, City—Dear Madam,” and signed, “Your most obliged and obedient servant, Writing-Desk."...

It had been the intention of Mr. V.V. to call personally at the sick-room before breakfast, to see how Kern liked the arrival and appearance of Writing-Desk. But Miss Masters frustrated him at the door, saying that the child’s heart was set upon conveying her thanks by formal note, and she had worried and fretted so over being refused that it seemed best to give her her way, particularly as she did not seem so well to-day. And in his disappointment over these tidings, the doctor presently forgot the desk entirely.

However, Kern’s note arrived in the office an hour later, through the Kindness of Miss Masters, as the envelope advised. Mr. V.V. suspended a sentence to one of his sick in the middle to read it:

MY DEAR DR. VIVIAN:

Oh, Mr. V.V., how can I ever thank you for given me this lovely Writen Desk. I greatly appreciate your kind gift. Just putten my hands on it makes me so happy, I could cry, oh the soft feel this Pretty wood has got to it.Your kind thought of me at this time has indeed pleased me. One is never so appreciative of the thought of one’s friends, if I can call you my Friend, Mr. V.V., as when one lies in pain upon a sickbed, th’o I have no pain. It’s the lovlyest sweetest dearest Desk ever was Mr. V.V., and how can me and Mommer ever make up for all you done for us. I don’t know. I have every hope for a speedy change for the better in my condition, and I never dreamed Id’ have a Ladys Writen Desk truly, or haven one would make me oh so Happy. My first note, dear Dr. Vivian, goes to you.

With repeated thanks for your considerate thought of me
during my illness, believe me, with kind remembrances,

Yours very cordially,

Your faithful friend CORINNE.

The young man distributed mental italics as he read. He detected at sight the footprints of the Netiquette and Complete Letter Writer. But he did not smile once as he read and reread the odd little mosaic, and folded it at last and put it away in a pigeonhole of its own. No, his stabbing thought was only, Why didn’t I do it all long ago?... Why?...

And similar things he thought next morning, and the next and next. For Kern did not get well, no matter what the calendar said, no matter how loyally Writing-Desk stood at her elbow to serve her, as It had said in the Note. Her morning temperature shot up a degree again, and there it stood day after day, and would not go down. Kern obviously

grew thinner and weaker. And there came a day when the President of the Settlement Association, Mr. Stewart Byrd, came in person to the Dabney House before ten o'clock, and sent all the workmen away. He said there must be no noise about the place that day....

Page 63

That relapse passed, but no one could say what a day might bring forth. The young doctor looked back over the past; he bowed beneath the burden that he felt upon him. However, due credit must be given to his friend Samuel O'Neill for assisting him to bring his sober meditations to a focus.

In these days O'Neill, having got his stiff factory law drafted, was becoming concerned with the problem of landing it on the statute-books. The complexion of the incoming legislature, which met in January, promised to be conservative; and the Commissioner, breathing threatenings and slaughter against the waist-coated interests which had so flouted his warnings last winter, had decided that a preliminary press campaign would be needed—beginning, say, November 1st—to arouse public opinion to the needs of reform. The lively "Chronicle," the "labor paper," offered space for a series of contributed articles from the Commission office, always provided that "hot stuff" only was furnished, by which was meant vigorous, if not libelous, assaults upon the existing order.

Now it became the earnest wish of Commissioner O'Neill that these hot-stuff articles should be written for him by his friend V.V., of the reformatory passions and the pen of a ready writer. And, the whole subject having been discussed several times in an indecisive sort of way, O'Neill one night whacked out a jagged argument.

"I had 'em going eight months ago—was starting out for Heth's with an axe—and you asked me to leave 'em to you. I thought you had something—an idea.... Say, V.V., suppose we'd gone and out bagged 'em then, like I wanted—would your friend Corinne be lyin' at death's door now?"

There was, indeed, nothing precisely original in this inquiry; but, put by another, and in so bald a form, it undoubtedly came upon a man somewhat stark and hard. The two men stood talking on a street corner, where they had met by chance, and their conversation here came to an end. V.V.'s reply to Sam's question was indefinite, to say the least of it. He merely observed that he must be getting on back to the office; adding that he didn't like to be absent for any length of time just now. But he didn't say at all, by that annoying habit of reserve he had, whether or not he would agree to write the *articles! That* was what Samuel O'Neill wanted to know....

It was September now, the third night. At his office the doctor found two calls for him, noted on a scrap of brown wrapping-paper in the rudimentary hand of Mrs. Garland. He went out again, disappearing over the Hill into that quarter of the town which was less cheering than honest slums. Returning, about ten, he found the Dabney House entirely silent: all quiet from the direction of the sick-room. All quiet, too, in the tall bare office. Very quiet, indeed....

It was a strange-looking room to be a doctor's office; on the whole a strange-looking young man to be a doctor; no stereotyped thoughts, it may be, pounding through the

head he held so fast between his hands. Strange entanglements were here, too, with the brilliant life over the Gulf: a life whose visible thread, it is easily surmised, will hardly lead us by this ancient secretary again.

Page 64

He was all alone in the world; very much so. His father was dead; and his mother, who had married a penniless idealist for love, was dead these many years. Fifteen he was when she died ... a long time ago. And he had had nobody since. He had just been beginning to feel close to his Uncle Armistead, and now Uncle Armistead was dead, too. And he had no sisters or brothers. He had no wife or children....

He was alone, and by that token he was free. No tie bound up the hope of others in him. Had he felt the sting of youth's rage to make things better? No bond of another's claim withheld him from spending himself to the uttermost.

All this had long been clear. Long clear also were the two paths trod by the noble army, men and boys. There were those who preached a more abundant living; and there were those who lived that living.... A glorious thing, indeed, it was for a man so to go his quiet ways that he became an example and model to his fellows, who were made better in that their lives had touched his exemplary one. But here, alas, was an aspiration for the saints, not for weak men with known bitternesses and passions in their blood, and all youth's furies hot upon them. And surely in that other summons there was, besides, the thrill of romance, such as the young love. There was the trumpeting to high adventure. Few there were to touch, few to remember, even the saintliest life lived in a noble narrowness, a noble silence. But the word of truth, spoken from no matter what obscurity, will rise and ring round the world, and remain forever in the pattern of men's thought. Here, indeed, was a 'bliss to die with, dim-descried.'...

So it was that one boy had found his heroic ideal, long since, in the grim voice crying in the wilderness. And in the years the secret picture had grown very clear, curiously full of meaning. There was descried, like something remembered from another life, an innumerable company upon a rocky plain, a little river rushing by, and in the distance a City....

He had seen something of life in his time at the medical school, and before that, when he was still looking about, trying to decide what he should do. He had observed in these days of leisure, read, and burned. And he had come back to his old home-city, overflowing with fine passions, aflame with new-old secrets and forgotten truths. What speeches there had been to make in those days, what roaring things to write, what shouts to be flung from the house-tops!

And now he had been at home again over a year; he had been right here in the Dabney House a year this month. And what had he done for his faith?

Page 65

He had done precisely what a weak man does, precisely what he had passionately resolved never to do. He had found life hard, and he had compromised with it. A minute routine pressed upon him, and he had suffered that routine to swamp his perspective, to drown out his fires. It was a good and useful work that he did: he never doubted that. To take the pain from a sick body, to put a coat on a bare back, this was worth a man's doing. But none knew better than he that that body would grow sick again, that back once more wear naked: and all the while the untouched causes of these wrongs festered and reinfected and spread, and a fig for your Settlements and your redoubled "relief." Was there not a bay-tree that flourished, and had he not been summoned in a vision to lay an axe to its roots? Behold, he gave his youth to spraying at the parasites upon a single small leaf.

And was it only the grinding round of work that had brought him to this compromise? Was it possible that personal considerations had seduced him, as Samuel O'Neill appeared to hint? That would be base, indeed....

But no ... No, his mind, though it seemed without mercy to-night, would acquit him of that. If he had been seduced, it was by a voice in him, confused, it might be, but strong nevertheless, and not dishonest. He had thought that perhaps people could be more gently acquainted with their responsibilities, that in their hearts they wanted to correct their own mistakes. He had asked who appointed him a judge over men....

And now there were articles to write, to publish in November, to begin to prepare now. Hard articles they must be, that broke heads or hearts, implied faiths, too, and did not care. And in the young man's ears there rang, and would not cease, the cry of a girl in great sorrow: "You've never meant anything but trouble to me since the first minute I saw you."... And again, in another voice: "I really didn't mean to do anything so bad."...

As if he hadn't known that....

He was alone in the world, and by that token he was a lonely man. He had no mother or brother or sisters. He had no wife or children.... No, nor would have this side the undiscovered country....

Abruptly the young man rose from his seat at the secretary; stood, pushing back his hair. Twenty-seven years old he was, a lame slum doctor in a fire-new suit of Prince serge, lately bought cheap at a sale; but he had a face that people sometimes turned to look at in the street.

And he spoke aloud, in a voice that might have sounded queer if there had been anybody to hear it:

"Don't I know they're doing the best they can, all the time? Seems to me I've had that proved ... Give 'em a chance, and *they're all good*...."

* * * * *

Far in the stillness there sounded the sweet mad voice of the Garlands' clock. It struck seven, and then two, and then fell silent. V. Vivian glanced at his watch. It seemed to be quarter to twelve, though he did not see how that was possible. He opened his office door, and stood listening. Presently he stepped through; went walking without noise down the long hall, which was pitch-black but for a dim haze of light just perceptible at its extreme farther end. When he came to this small patch, the young man lifted the curtain, and stood motionless.

Page 66

A single gaslight burned in the sick-room, shaded with a green globe and turned down very low. The electric fan was silent, and the faint fever-smell was in the air. In the nearer white bed the nurse slept, with light snores. In the other, Kern Garland slept, lying almost at the bed's edge. One of her arms had wandered from the covers; the small hand was curled about the polished leg of Writing-Desk, which was squeezed as close to the bed as it would go.

Vivian went in on silent feet. Presently he sat down in his accustomed chair on the farther side of the bed. He stared fixedly at the small flushed face, which looked more elfin than ever now that the flesh was wasting away....

What demerit had this little girl that she should be ordered to give up her health and life only that others might wear fine raiment and live in kings' houses? Surely it was not God who had laid that sentence upon her.

Corinne Garland and the Heth Works: it was long since these two had first seized his mind like a watchword. For here was no matter of one small girl who worked more hours than her strength would bear; no matter even of one large factory which harnessed the life of three hundred men and women and drove them over-hard. But was not this the perfect symbol of that preying of the fortunate upon the unfortunate, of that crushing inequality of inheritance, which reacted so deadeningly upward and downward, and more than anything else hobbled the feet of Man? By one flagrant instance, by Kern at Heth's, all the pitiful wrong-headedness was made plain. Pinned forever to the accident of economic birth, all their energies sucked up by the struggle for bread and meat, these poor were mocked with bitter "equality" which did not equalize, but despoiled of all chance to extricate themselves from their poverty. And their terrible revenge was to spread their own stagnation upward. Neither could the rich extricate themselves from their riches. The sorriest thing in the picture was that they did not desire to. Behold how blindly they struggled to cut the brotherly cord that bound them to what was common and unclean, and that cord their souls' one light....

The still young man looked at the face of his little patient, and his mind went back to that day when he and O'Neill had visited the Heth Works, last October, and he had seen Kern at her machine. He had come back ablaze, and he had then written that Severe Arraignment which Mr. Heth had threatened to sue the "Post" for publishing, but never had.... And then ... and then he had thought that perhaps nothing so loud and harsh would be needed. Hopeful months went by. Then trouble had come to a family, and he had stayed his hand again.... And now, Kern Garland, who was dear to him, whose right and need he had failed to voice....

"Oh!... *Mr. V.V.!*"

Without warning, the little girl sat up in bed, her cheeks bright, her eyes wide and shining. Yet it seemed that she had called Mr. V.V.'s name a little before her eyes fell upon his silent figure.

Page 67

“Oh, Mr. V.V.!” she repeated in a low eager voice, hardly above a whisper.... “I been havin’ the loveliest dreams!...”

The young man put out a hand and pressed it firmly against her hot forehead.

“Lie down, little Kern.”

She lay down obediently, her face wearing a strange half-smile. Though her eyes were wide, her look was that of a person between sleeping and waking: she showed no surprise at Mr. V.V.’s being there by her bedside.

“Mr. V.V., I had on a white sating Persian dress, lowneg, and embroidery and loops of pearls put on all over it, and white sating pumps, and a fan all awstritch feathers. I was at a German—y’ know?—”

“You mustn’t talk now, Kern. Put your arm under the cover and go back to sleep—”

“*Lemme*, Mr. V.V.! Please. It’s on’y a minute to tell. Can’t I, sir?... I was at a German, with ladies and gempmen, and there was pink lights—and vi’lins—and plants—and little presents they give you for dancin’—and flowers—and such lovely clo’es!... On’y I didn’t have a partner. Like a stag, y’ know? And then pretty soon I saw people looking at me, and kep’ on looking, and one of ’em that looked somep’n like Miss Masters, on’y it wasn’t her, says, ‘Wot’s that girl a-doin’ here?’ she says. ‘Why, she’s a buncher down to Heth’s.’ So I walked on off and set down at my Writin’-Desk, and made out I didn’t notice and was writin’ notes or somep’n, like. And then I looks up and they was all coming over to me, like sayin’ move on now, and then I looks off again and there was you and Miss Heth, settin’....”

Her listener was by no means surprised at the introduction of this name. Many times had Kern spoken of her meeting with Miss Heth, that Sunday she took the note, though Mr. V.V. did not know that from that day dated her preference for white dresses, as compared with red....

“Settin’ on a velvet settee you was,” whispered Kern, her hand picking at the sheet, “by a founting, a boy with wings and a pink lamp on his head, pourin’ water out of a gool’ pitcher. And I went runnin’ over to you to ast you must I go—or somep’n. And then up comes all the ladies and gempmen and says, ‘This girl don’t belong here,’ they says, ’she must go at once.’ And Miss Heth she gets up and says, ’Not at all, this here girl is a friend of me and Doctor’s.’ And I says, ’No, ma’am, it’s right what they say, I don’t belong here.’ But she says to them to leave me be. ‘And do you, Co-rinne,’ she says—just that away, like you used to say—’do you, Corinne, come and set on this velvet settee with me and Doctor, and listen to this here founting play.’ And I felt sad someways and I says, ’Oh, no, ma’am, it’s all a mistake me being here, and these clo’es mustn’t belong to a workin’-girl like me. I might go to school some day,’ I says, ’and be

a writer sort of, mebbe; but I ain't a lady, ma'am, Miss Heth, no, nor never will be.' And Miss Heth she takes

Page 68

my face between her hands—yes, sir, she did, Mr. V.V., right there before 'em all—and she says, kind of surprised, 'Why, Co-rinne, I thought Doctor he told you long ago,' she says. 'You been a lady all the time ...' And then ... and then I woke up!... Wasn't that funny?" said Kern. And her face indicated that she might have told more, if she had had a mind to....

She lay staring, with parted lips and that same remote half-smile, as of one not yet fully returned from fairy wanderings in far lands. She did not seem to expect her inquiry to bring forth any response from the man sitting in the shadows, and it didn't, so far as words went. Mr. V.V.'s fingers had closed over her exposed wrist; presently he put the bony little arm back under the cover, rose, and went over silently to the other gas-jet where the little fixture was. The nurse, who had risen on an elbow at the first sound of voices, had lain down again at the young man's signal. She did not stir now, though perhaps she was not asleep.

Mr. V.V. returned to the bed with a cup in his hand. Kern was lying exactly as he had left her—"the wonder was not quite yet gone from that still look of hers."

"Drink this, Kernie...."

She drank incuriously, with his supporting hand upon her back; was gently lowered upon her pillow again; and then she turned upon her side, wide-eyed still, but silent.

"Now, go to sleep. I'll sit here by you...."

He noted the fact of beef-tea at twelve-thirty upon the chart, and sat again in the shadows. Soon Kern's eyelids drooped, and in time she fell asleep.

But the doctor sat on in the dim room, long after his charity sick had slipped back again to her happy dreams. And as he sat, there waxed a flame in him, and he pledged himself that henceforward there should be no pausing, neither compassion nor compunction. What mattered the troubles of individuals? What mattered himself, or that Duty to-night seemed visaged like an Iron Maid? Here, indeed, there beckoned him the great good task. The day of the rocky plain and the prophet in a loincloth was gone; but was there less might in the printed word and the penny newspaper? Spare this child, Lord, and the wrongs done upon her shall not again lack a voice....

And later, much later, when the tall young man limped back to his desolate office, he did not at once go to bed, though the small hours then were fast growing. Six weeks, and more, he had to write his articles in: but there was that in him now which would not be denied. He sat again at his old secretary, a cheap pad before him, and the words that ran from his stub of a pencil were words winged with fire....

* * * * *

If this was a compact offered, it seemed that it had been sealed in high places. Next morning, which was the morning of September 4th, Miss Masters came smiling to the Garland breakfast-table; and all that day, for the first time in seven weeks, Kern's temperature did not move above 103. On the morning following, it slipped down another half-degree; on the third, the same; and on the fourth morning there existed no reasonable doubt that she was going to get well.

Page 69

But V. Vivian, the doctor, was not one to forget his mistakes in thanksgiving, merely because the consequences had been lifted from his shoulders. If he had failed once to provide for his little friend, there should never be any trouble on that score again. So he made it all sure and definite now, by the legal-sounding paper he drew up; and Henry Bloom, the undertaker on the next block, who was also a notary public, came in and certified the signature. And he too declined his fee for his trouble, to the wealthy young testator's perceptible annoyance....

That was on September 12th. And next day it was that the morning "Post" informed all readers that Mrs. B. Thornton Heth and Miss Heth, having just returned from a summer's travel in Europe, had arrived in the city, and were again at their town-house, No. 903 Washington Street.

XXIII

One Summer in Europe, which she never speaks of now; Home again, with what a difference; Novel Questionings, as to what is a Friend, *etc*.

It was life's waggish way that the project conceived in the obscure dreams of an out-at-elbows young man, and born a foundling upon his money, should have been adopted at sight as the spoiled darling of fashion's ultra-fashionable. Undoubtedly, astute Mr. Dayne had had somewhat to do with this, he who so well understood the connection between social prestige and the obtainment of endowment funds. But whatever the underlying causes and processes, it was plain that the Dabney House Settlement rode the crest of the "exclusive" wave this autumn. And the fact was grasped by Mrs. B. Thornton Heth within twenty-four hours of her home-coming, so admirably was it fitted to her need.

Mrs. Heth had had time enough through the summer, heaven knew, to study out the problem of restoring the family name to its former effulgence, to decide upon the family attitude, or note, for the season ensuing. The note, already firmly struck in her summer's letters to friends,—with which she had taken immense pains, knowing from herself how closely they would be scanned,—was that poor Carlisle, shocked into hysteria by the tragedy, had magnanimously blamed herself where she had no blame beyond, perhaps, youthful thoughtlessness. Thus they were people, and in particular she was a person, severely persecuted for righteousness' sake, but resolved to bear it nobly.

So much for the note, but a passive thing at best. None saw more clearly than Mrs. Heth that a quietly resolute campaign of vindication was necessary, none more clearly that a campaign meant money in considerable sums. If you desired to prove anything, you must have money; stated in another way, you could prove anything provided you spent money enough. How best to spend large sums in this case?

Page 70

Musing long upon the family attitude in dull European days and nights, the good lady had gradually developed a complete code of etiquette, as of funerals. Thus she had concluded that to give an elaborate and superbly costly entertainment—ordinarily an unanswerable act of vindication—would under the circumstances be “in bad taste.” A series of small but exclusive dinners would better strike the note on the entertaining side; while, as for more public proof of martyrhood finely borne, she at length decided that frank deeds of selfless charity would be about the proper thing. She had no sooner come in touch again with the home atmosphere than she determined to give ten thousand dollars, perfectly anonymously, to Mr. Dayne’s Settlement House Foundation.

Carlisle thought these developments odd enough, and indifferently pictured her mother’s dismay, if suddenly informed whose cause it was she was so enthusiastically pitching in to help. For it seemed that she alone knew that the Settlement everybody was talking about was not Mr. Dayne’s at all, but Dr. Vivian’s, who wished his gift to be kept a secret. Carlisle said nothing to unsettle her mother, who possibly still thought that Hugo Canning, the gone but not forgotten, was the royal contributor. The girl, indeed, observed with relief that mamma’s militant energies were once more in full swing. She had spent six weeks with the little lady when every particle of fight had been flattened out of her, and that was an experience she was not anxious to repeat.

Cally herself was glad to be at home again, though this was a home-coming like none other she had ever known. Four months’ use had not robbed memory of its poignancy, and the moment of arrival at the House she found unexpectedly painful. However, there came at once the remeeting with papa, and the first and worst hour of reconnection with the old life again was lubricated with reunion and much talk.

Mr. Heth had been lonely and somewhat depressed during the summer, as his letters had revealed. But he was unaffectedly happy at having his wife and daughter back, and lingered over the breakfast-table till nearly ten o’clock, so much did he have to ask, and to tell, about the summer.

Of that summer Carlisle never afterwards liked to talk. The first weeks of it always stood out in her mind as the most wretched period of her life. All spirit, all pluck, all dignity and self-respect appeared to have been crushed out by the disasters which had befallen her. There was absolutely nothing left on earth to be thankful for, except that the engagement had never been announced.

Through these days Cally hadn’t seemed to care that Jack Dalhousie had killed himself, hadn’t cared if the constrained tone of Mattie Allen’s “steamer-letter”—which said that Mattie was terribly sorry, dear, but was vague as to what—indicated that the Heth glories had undergone a great and permanent eclipse. All her consciousness seemed sucked into the great

Page 71

ragged hole in her life left by Canning's going. Not till now, it seemed, had she realized to what measure her prince of lovers had twined himself into the reaches of her being. To pluck him, at a word, from her heart would have been a difficult task at best, and it was made the more difficult for her in that she did not, at first, put her will into it. For there had lingered in her a sort of stunned incredulity: she could not quite believe that their quarrel had been irretrievable, that Hugo was gone forever. In the four days' waiting and hiding in New York, even after she had put the ocean definitely between them, she multiplied her woes by keeping the small door of hope constantly open against her lover's possible return. And oh, how wretched she was through these days, how sorry, sorry for herself!

And mamma was enormously sorry for herself; and there they were, the worst companions for each other that could possibly have been found in the world. So they had sat down in London, in a modest family-hotel well off the track of tourists and of fashion; for none knew better than mamma when to draw the purse-strings tight, and the European tour, planned as a triumphal progress, had been abased to a refuge and rustication.

The average women in such a situation would, of course, quickly have pooled their sorrows for mutual comfort; but these two were fixedly held apart by their fundamental lack of sympathy with each other, and further by the disciplinary character of mamma's attitude. Whatever she wrote in her letters, Mrs. Heth's personal note was that Carlisle had wilfully brought shame and disgrace upon her ever indulgent parents, and she did not desire that the girl should be diverted for a moment from the contemplation of her errors. In their quiet quarters, they saw practically no one, did nothing but make themselves and each other as miserable as they could. They fairly wallowed in their respective seas of self-pity. And days passed when they hardly exchanged a word.

Of course so abject a surrender to the slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune could not last indefinitely. Human nature's safety-valve is its extraordinary resilience. Hope springs eternal, *etc*. Nevertheless, it took a small shock or so to arouse these two women at the mill from their spiritless prostration. One night in early July, Carlisle came suddenly upon the name of Hugo Canning in the foreign tattle column of a London newspaper. She read, with intense fixity of gaze, that Hugo was in Europe: in short, that Hugo was enjoying himself at Trouville, where he was constantly seen in the company of the Honorable Kitty Belden, second daughter of So-and-So, and so forth....

Page 72

All this time, Carlisle had been taking upon herself most of the blame for the quarrel and break. She had been distracted and unreasonable; she had never explained to Hugo sensibly how it had all happened; it was only natural that he should have misunderstood and misjudged, and in the end lost his temper and said hard things which he did not mean. And he was suffering by it no less than she: oh, be sure of that.... Now, as she sat alone in her bedroom, the newspaper crumpled on the floor beside her, there seemed to fall scales from her eyes, and she saw how bitterly she had deceived herself. Where was now the love pledged to last forever? Six weeks parted from her, and gaily gallivanting at the slipper-toes of happier girls, whom the breath of trouble had not touched.

Not even in this moment did Carlisle tax her once-betrothed with moral wrong in the matter of the "telling," for that whole episode had remained in her mind rather a flare-up of mysterious emotions than a case of religious "conviction of sin" and atonement. Probably Hugo had said and done what he thought was right then. But now it was clear to her, as by a flash, that he had done wrong in quite a different way, that he had committed the deadly sin of love. He had deserted her in the moment of her greatest need of him. At the first pinch his boasted mighty love had broken down; and, beneath all the disguises, it was such a contemptible little pinch at that, only that he was afraid of what people might say about her. Now he stepped the beaches of France, a squire of dames unconcerned. Should she wear her heart in mourning for a light-o'-love and a jilt? She would not. She would not....

Easier said than done, no doubt. Yet Cally's thoughts had at least received a powerful new twist, which is the beginning of reconstruction. And it was only a day or two later that mamma in her turn received an arousing blow, in that debasing of her by the Associated Charities which her niece-in-law, Henrietta Cooney, had mentioned to the Dabney House.

As it happened there came a letter from Hen Cooney by the same mail that brought mamma's death-dealing one from Mrs. McVey. For Hen, who had never dreamed of corresponding with Cally before, had started up this summer with a long and quite affectionate steamer-letter, and had since written regularly once a week, the newsiest and really the most interesting letters that the Heths got at all. This letter had a private postscript, written on a separate sheet, which said:

Cally, I don't know how you'll take it, but I think I ought to tell you frankly how matters stand. Of course there was plenty of talk, especially at first, and some of it was pretty strong. But whether you like it or not, most of the responsibility for what happened is being put on Aunt Isabel. Do you remember Mrs. John S. Adkins who was at the Beach the day it happened? She has told everybody it was Aunt Isabel

Page 73

who came downstairs and told her and others the story that they afterwards repeated. And then, besides, it seems to be generally understood that you were the one who wanted to straighten things out when you had no idea it was too late, and everybody whose opinion is worth having knows it's easy enough to slip into a mistake, but takes a lot of spunk to stand up and say so long afterwards. Good-bye again.

Hen.

Carlisle removed this postscript, tore it into small pieces, and put the pieces in the waste-basket under a newspaper. Later in the afternoon she had to go into her mother's bedroom to recover a novel which the older lady had abstracted for her own perusal. She found her mother lying on the bed, an open letter in her hand and on her face the marks of rare tears.

Carlisle, turning away with her book, hesitated. The two women had not spoken a word all that day.

"What's the matter, mamma?" she said constrainedly.

Mrs. Heth, stirring a little on the bed, said, with difficulty: "The Associated Charities met to elect new officers. I am—omitted from the board." She added, in a voice from which she could not keep the self-pity: "I should naturally—have been president this year."

Her crushed mildness touched Carlisle abruptly. For the first time in all this trouble, perhaps for the first time in her life, she had a considerate and sympathetic thought for her mother. It was mamma, it seemed, upon whom the reprisals of society were to fall most heavily, yet it was she, Cally, who had caused it all. Suppose she had been a good daughter, to begin with; suppose she had even been an obedient daughter, and had kept her own counsel, as mamma had commanded and implored. Ah, how different would have been this ghastly summer!...

She walked over to the bed, quite pale, put her hand on her mother's rumpled hair, and said with some agitation:

"I'm very sorry to have given you all this trouble, mamma."

Mrs. Heth looked up at her, her small eyes winking.

"Oh—I—I'm sure you meant to do what you thought was right. But—oh, Cally!..."

And then she was weeping in her daughter's arms.

Perhaps the stout little lady was ready now for a reconciliation. Perhaps the strain of silent censoriousness had worn out even her strong will. Perhaps, in some far cranny of

her practical heart, there was a spark which secretly admired Cally for her suicidal madness. At any rate, drying her eyes presently, she said:

“How Mary Page will gloat over this.... Well, we can’t go on this way, my child. We’ll die if we don’t have some diversion. Lord knows we’ll need all our strength for the fall.”

And still later, she suddenly cried: “LET’S GO TO PARIS!”

To Paris they went; and there, occupying more fashionable quarters, began to look about for pleasure. The looking required effort at first and was scantily rewarded; but of course it was not long before the women’s spirits responded to the more hopeful atmosphere. Soon they fell in with some lively people from home, the Wintons, who, being a peg or two lower than the Heths in the gay world, made it almost indelicately plain that they were completely unaware of anything’s having happened. To Paris also came J. Forsythe Avery.

Page 74

And now, in the passage of the weeks, the mother and daughter were at home again, with Carlisle finding that memory still had power to stab, and Mrs. Heth stoutly girding herself for the great fight of her life, and almost happy....

If it had taken the violent break to reveal to Cally how deeply Hugo Canning had come into her life, it seemed to take this home-coming to impress upon her how definitely he had departed. There was hardly anything in the house that was not in some way associated with him, or with her thought of him. Outdoors it was hardly better: wherever she turned, she found, mementoes of his absence. Strange and sad to think that he and she would ride these familiar streets no more. He had left her alone, to find her feet again in a changed world as best she might. Where was he on this day and on this, with whom making merry, her false knight who could not love as he could fear the world's opinion?...

It was September, and people were beginning to troop back in numbers from the holiday places of their desire. Cally's first days at home were full of meetings, with those now seen for the first time under strangely altered conditions.

She was not wanting in spirit, but she lacked her mother's splendid pachydermousness. More than mamma, she had shrunk from this first painful plunge, and now that it had come she was receptive to impressions which quite escaped the older lady. Outwardly, indeed, as she perceived with some surprise, the greetings of friends and acquaintances were much as they had always been. But she was at once conscious of a certain new quality in people's looks, a certain hard exploring curiosity, not untouched with a fleeting and furtive air of triumph. This look seemed to confront her, with varying degrees of emphasis, on nearly every face. To her sensitiveness it was as if, beneath cordial speech, everybody was really saying: "Aha!... So you're the young lady who hounded that chap into killing himself and got jilted for your pains. Well, well! Perhaps you won't be quite so high-and-mighty after this...."

Even Carlisle's most intimate friends, try as they doubtless did, seemed unable to help showing that they considered her lot in the world sadly changed. So, indeed, it was. Mattie and Evey could not, for instance, begin naturally by asking, "Cally, did you have a lovely summer?"—when of course they knew very well that she had had a perfectly frightful summer. Mattie came in before eleven o'clock on the first morning, chirping affectionate greetings; but neither then nor later did she manage to convey any real sense of sympathy with Cally, or of understanding what she had been through, or even of wanting to understand. Cally would have liked to justify herself to Mattie, to talk her heart out to her, or to somebody; but Mattie's idea was clearly to keep Cally's mind off it, as you do with the near relatives of the deceased. And was it possible that even Mats's sweet girlishness showed a subtle trace of confirmation of the Frenchman's bitter maxim, that in the misfortunes of our friends there is something not altogether displeasing to us?...

Page 75

If with Mats and Evey, so and much more so with others, less genuinely friendly. Nobody took the responsibility of open condemnation, as by “cutting” Mrs. B. Thornton Heth or her daughter. On the other hand, nobody forgot; nobody made allowances; nobody asked a single question. Judgment was obviously passed, and everybody seemed perfectly clear about the verdict. The Heths were people to be treated with respect as long as they kept their money, but between you and me, their social fortunes had received a stain which would not wear off. Hugo Canning had had it exactly right. Cally Heth would be pointed at to the longest day she lived....

Cally, after the first shrinking, was possessed by a sense of anti-climax. Life had a brassy ring. She had come home with at least something of her mother’s military keenness for the “campaign” of vindication, but within a day or two she was thinking, rather cynically and cheaply, that the game was not worth the candle. What difference did it all make, in her actual life? People might whisper and nudge behind her back, but their invitations seemed to come in much the same as ever, poor mamma pouncing on each as it came, with a carefully appraising eye. Wasn’t there a hollowness in all this, something wanting?...

Untrained for analysis as she was, she had not thought of herself, in the months in Europe, as “changed” exactly. It took this recontact with the familiar environment to reveal to her definitely that her experiences of the spring and summer had not rolled through her as through an iron tube. Here were the old stimuli (as scientific fellows term them); but they failed to bring the old reactions. She was aware that the elevation of the family position, or its rescue, no longer filled her whole horizon. Old values shifted. In particular, she found her soul revolting at the prospect of another season—her fifth—-another winter of endless parties, now with a secret campaign thrown in.

“I’m tired of the same old round, that’s all,” she said, moodily. “I want something new—-something *different*.”

“There’s plenty that’s new and different, Cally,” said Henrietta Cooney, cheerfully, “if you really want to go in for it. And ten times as interesting as your old society....”

“And while I think of it,” added Hen, “I want to book you now for Saturday afternoon, four-thirty—open meeting at the Woman’s Club on What Can We Do to Help the Poor. Don’t say no. This new man Pond’s going to speak, Director of the Settlement. He’ll give us something to take home and think about.”

This conversation took place on the way home from a meeting of the Equal Suffrage League, to which Henrietta had borne off Cally, not so completely against the latter’s will as you might have supposed. And oddly enough, Cally found that she could talk quite freely to her poor cousin, partly because of Hen’s insignificance in the gay world, partly, perhaps, because of the way she had written during the summer.

Page 76

“Aren’t you going to the Settlement opening on Thursday?”

“Can’t get away from the bookstore in time. Saturday’s a short day,” said Hen, her eyes on space.... “Look around you, Cally. You’ll see lots more women than you who’re sick of parties. I tell you this is the most interesting time to be alive in that ever was.”

Cally smiled wearily at these enthusiasms. Nevertheless she could by now understand at least what Hen supposed she was talking about. It was as if the cataclysm in the May-time had chipped a peep-hole in the embracing sphere of her girlhood’s round, and through this hole she began to discern novel proceedings afoot....

Strange talk was in the air of the old town in those days, strange things heard and seen. Not a few women of the happy classes had grown “sick of parties.” They grew sick of years lived without serious purpose, waiting for husband and children which sometimes never came; sick of their dependence, of their idleness, of their careful segregation from the currents of life about them. They wearied, in short, of their position of inferior human worth, which some perceived, and others began dimly to suspect, under that glittering cover of fictions which looked so wholly noble till you stopped to think (which women should never do), and dared to glance sidewise at the seams underneath. And now lately some high-hearted spirits had begun to voice their sickness, courageously braving those penalties which society so well knows how to visit upon those who disturb the accepted prejudices; penalties, it might be, peculiarly trying to women, over which some of these supposedly masculated pioneers doubtless had more than one good cry in secret.

What could be more interesting than the revolt of woman against “chivalry” in chivalry’s old home and seat? That curious phenomenon was going on in Cally’s town now, though acuter social critics than she had quite failed to discover it....

Far rumors of her sex’s strange activities reached Cally, and she listened, but with apathy. She marvelled at the freshness of interest with which Mattie and Evey McVey were preparing for the light routine which by now they knew like an old shoe. But her own mood was nothing more forceful than meaningless restlessness and discontent. Not even the unlooked-for arrival, one morning, of the dividend from the bank stock her father had given her in May, all her own, afforded her more than a flicker of the familiar joys. How employ fifteen hundred dollars so that it would bring her happiness now? Cally, after listless deliberation, took her wealth to her father that afternoon, offering it as a contribution toward mamma’s Settlement donation. Her impulse was hardly sheer magnanimity; still, it was known that finance was a distinctly live issue in the House just now.

However, papa, after staring at her a moment, merely gathered her into his arms, check and all, remarking that she was a goose; and when she tried to argue about it a little, he ruled the situation with a strong paternal hand. She was to buy herself pretties with that

money, he said; and there, there, he didn’t want to hear any more foolishness about it. No more Alphonse and Gaspard, as the fellow said....

Page 77

“And, Cally,” he added, pinching her cheek, “I want you to have a good time this winter, remember. You can have anything you want. Go everywhere you’re invited—enjoy yourself with your friends—have a good time. D’you hear me?”

She said that she did: and as she spoke, a bitter question rose at her. Who were her friends? She had always thought of herself as having many; “hosts of friends” had always figured prominently in her inventories of her blessings. But what was a friend? Among all these people she had spent her life with, there was not one, it seemed, who cared to understand the infinite shadings of thought and impulse that had brought her to where she now stood; much less one heart which saw intuitively

> All the world’s coarse thumb
> And finger failed to plumb...

Papa was adding, with an unconscious frown:

“The cash is in the bank, if your mother must have it. I’d laid it by for something else, though—make some repairs at the Works. Come in.... I reckon I’ve staved off ...”

Considered from one angle, these fragmentary words might have been illuminating; but Cally did not even hear them. At that moment there happened the unexpected. The parlormaid Annie entered, announcing Mrs. Berkeley Page to see Miss Carlisle.

Surprise was expressed in the study. This was the lady who had said that the Heths were very improbable people. Papa opined, somewhat glumly, that she had come to beg funds for the confounded Settlement. Cally, having looked at herself in the mirror, trailed into the drawing-room with a somewhat cool and challenging civility.

But her coolness soon melted away, under the visitor’s strange but seemingly genuine cordiality. It became clear that she had come in the vein of amity, and without sinister motives; though why, if not for Settlement funds, could not be imagined.

Mrs. Page was a tall, pleasant-faced woman, still on the right side of forty, a widow whose husband had left her too much of this world’s goods for her ever to be classed as a poorhouse Tory; and despite the fact that she was a leader in the old-school, as opposed to the brass-band, set, many people considered her a very agreeable woman. She had amusing things to say, and she said them in the Heth drawing-room with no air of awkwardness. Carlisle, somewhat against her will, was soon thinking her extremely attractive. But the thawing out went further than that.

Talk turned by chance—or perhaps it was not chance exactly—on those growing currents of feminine activity which had nothing to do with dinners and dances: and here the visitor expressed ideas which did not seem old-school in the least. It appeared that she, Mary Page, in the period of her spinsterhood, for she hadn’t been married till she

was twenty-six, a thoroughgoing old maid in those days,—had also wearied of the gay round; she had desired to *do something*. But alas, she had suddenly discovered that she wasn't fitted to do one earthly thing, having been trained only to be a trimming. She said, smiling, that she had cried all one day about it....

Page 78

“Why is it assumed, really,” said she, “that women are such poor little butterflies that amusing and being amused should absorb all their energies? I don’t think of myself as a pet, do you, Miss Heth? Give us something solid to do, and the world wouldn’t be so full of discontented women. Do you know, if I had a daughter,” said Mrs. Page, “and she wasn’t married after three years ‘out,’ and hadn’t developed any special talent, I should send her straight down to Hartman’s Business College, and have her learn typewriting. Yes, I should!—and make her get a place in an office, too, at five dollars a week!...”

The distinguished visitor remained twenty minutes in the improbable drawing-room, and contrived to make herself interesting. When she rose to go, she mentioned that she was staying at her mother’s place in the country till after Thanksgiving, and was only in town for the day. And then, as she held out her hand, smiling in a simple and friendly way, her expression changed, and she brought up her other hand and laid it over Carlisle’s.

“My dear,” she began, with some embarrassment, “I wonder if you will let a much older woman say how truly she has sympathized with you in—all this trouble—and how much she has admired you, too?...”

Cally’s eyes wavered and fell. And suddenly she divined that this, and nothing else, was what Mrs. Page had come to say.

“All of us make mistakes in this world,” went on the kind voice—“all that I know do wrong. But not all of us, I’m afraid, have the courage to go back and set right what we did, as bravely as you have done.”

The girl stood dumb.... Strange, indeed, that the first word of understanding sympathy she had had since her home-coming—barring only Hen Cooney—should have come from this worse than stranger, whom at a distance she had long secretly envied and disliked. One touch of generous kindness, and the hostility of years seemed to fall away....

She raised her eyes, trying with indifferent success to smile. But perhaps her look showed something of what she felt: for Mrs. Page immediately took the girl’s face between her hands and kissed her lightly on the cheek.

“May I?... I mean by it that I hope you’ll let me know you better, when I’m home again.... Good-bye.”

Cally caught the gloved hand upon her cheek, and said, with an impulsiveness far from her habit:

“I think you’re the sweetest person I ever saw....”

* * * * *

And two days later, she said to her mother, though in a distinctly frivolous tone:

“What would you think of me as a Settlement worker, mamma?”

“Settlement worker?... Well, we’ll see,” said Mrs. Heth, absently. “It remains to be seen how far the best people are going in for it....”

Cally laughed. She was beautifully dressed, and felt perfectly poised. It was five o’clock in the afternoon, and she and her mother were in the new vindication limousine, en route to the old Dabney House.

Page 79

“What difference does that make?”

“All the difference.... Now, Cally, don’t pick up any of poor Henrietta’s equality notions, just because you feel a little blue at present. This is going to come out all right. You may trust me.”

“I do,” said Cally, sincerely.

After a silence she added with a laugh: “Who are the best people, mamma?”

“I am, for one,” said mamma; and unconsciously her grasp lightened on the little ornamental bag where snuggled her Settlement check for Ten Thousand Dollars, securely bagged at last.

“Don’t let any poor nobodies pull you down to their level with their talk about merit,” said mamma. “What’s merit in society?”

XXIV

How the Best People came to the Old Hotel again; how Cally is Ornamental, maybe, but hardly a Useful Person; how she encounters Three Surprises from Three Various Men, all disagreeable but the Last.

To the Dabney House, it was like old times come back. Not in forty years had the ancient hostelry so resounded with the steps of the best people. Without, there stood lines of motor-cars in the shabby and unaccustomed street, ten times as many as there had been in May. Within—to prove at a stroke the tone of the gathering—J. Forsythe Avery himself stood conspicuously at the very door: not merely stood, but labored behind a deal table for the cause, distributing Settlement pamphlets, brochures or treatises, to all comers. He irresistibly reminded Carlisle of one of those lordly men in gold-lace outside a painless dentist’s parlors. Many others of the conquering order there were observed also, almost in the first glance; chiefly congregating in the new assembly room, where the “opening reception” was under way, but also deploying in numbers all over the lower floor and the remodeled basement beneath.

It was the Heths’ first public appearance since their home-coming, and perhaps even mamma felt a little bit self-conscious. But Carlisle had come with serious intentions, and a manner of determined vivacity. Let people find anything to gloat over in her appearance, if they could. Glancing about as they left Mr. Avery, she saw that the old court or lobby, where she had stood and talked once on a rainy May day, had been left intact, only renovated somewhat as to floor and walls. On one side of it now ran down a row of offices with new glass doors, the first of them, marked “Mr. Pond.” On the other side, a great arched doorway led into the large meeting-room, formed by the demolition

of many partitions. Changed indeed it all was: yet Cally found it quite disturbingly familiar too....

Page 80

Beyond the arched doorway stood a little group of the best men and women: a reception committee clearly, and Mrs. Heth had not been asked to serve upon it, as she was instantly and indignantly conscious. However, she was one to bear martyrdom nobly, knowing that truth would prevail in the end; and accordingly she greeted Byrds, Daynes, and others with marked and lingering cordiality. Carlisle, passing down the receiving line more quickly, soon found herself introduced to Pond, the imported Director, according to her plan. The phrase is accurate, for Mr. Pond appeared to be panjandrum here, and people of all degree were presented to him, as to royalty. Frequent hearing of the man's name in the last few days had suggested nothing to Carlisle, but the moment she caught sight of his keen face with the powerful blue-tinged jaw, she recalled that she had seen Mr. Pond in the Dabney House before now.

The Director had turned with businesslike indifference as Mr. Dayne spoke her name, but his expression as he looked at her took on a sudden half-surprised intentness which Carlisle had seen upon the faces of strangers before now. His reply to her commonplaces of greeting was:

"Where have I met you before?"

"Nowhere, I think."

Bored with the tenor of his speech, she looked at him steadily yet negligently for a moment; and then, releasing her gaze, continued: "This is the assembly room, isn't it? What sort of meetings are to held here?"

A faintly quizzical look came into the man's incisive stare. "Do you really think it worth while for me to explain, when—"

He left this beginning hanging in midair, while he turned, without apology, to accept the humble duties of three new arrivals. Cally waited patiently. Mrs. Berkeley Page had left her possessed of an impulse, which she took to be almost tantamount to a resolution. She would give at least part of her time to doing something solid....

Director Pond, turning back to her, concluded:

"When we are both well aware that you don't care a continental what sort of meetings are going to be held here?"

"Oh, but I do, you see," replied Cally, distinctly irritated. "I'm very much interested. One of the reasons I'm here this afternoon," she explained, not without an under-feeling of sad nobility, "is that I am thinking of offering myself as—as a worker."

"Oh!—As a worker."

"Yes."

“A worker. You mean it?”

She said, glancing indifferently away: “But probably Mr. Dayne is the person I should speak to about it.... Or—perhaps Dr. Vivian....”

“What’s Dayne or Vivian got to do with it? Walk a little away from the door with me—-there! Thank the Lord when this mob clears out.... So you want to offer as a worker,” said Director Pond, his face gravely authoritative. “Good. We need workers more than money now, which is putting it somewhat strongly. I am pleased that you will join us. When can you move in?”

Page 81

“Move in?”

“You understand, of course, that resident workers are the only ones good for anything. You will want to live here, for a year or so at least. Naturally the sooner you can come the better.”

“Live here? Here in the Dabney House? Well, no,” said Carlisle, with open amusement, “I could hardly do that.”

“Ah?” said he, without the slightest change of expression. “Well, that’s a pity.... Allow me to raise my hand and point at this wall, so; and now people will understand that I’m explaining important points to a worker, and will not interrupt. Of course there is something for the non-residents to do, too. Let us see now. You can sew, I suppose?”

“Sew?... Well—not really well at all.”

“Too bad,” said he, keeping his broad back to the lively groups about them and pointing steadily at the wall. “However—I’m thinking of putting in a woman’s infirmary. Can you recommend yourself as reasonably fitted for an assistant amateur nurse?”

“Oh, no! No, I couldn’t do that, I’m afraid. I can’t bear sickness.”

“Indeed? A great many people enjoy it.... Well!—district visitor it is, then, while we’re getting acquainted with the neighborhood. But it means business, you know—six days a week visiting in the homes of the poorest, dirtiest and meanest, investigating, collecting facts under instructions you will get from me—”

“Oh! Well, no—not that. I—I’m afraid my mother wouldn’t care to have me do that.”

The man’s pointing hand, which was large and strong-looking, fell at his side, and he gazed at her with a sarcasm which he no longer troubled to conceal.

“May I ask what under the sun you can do?”

“What I can do?...”

Under his hard and frankly belittling stare, Carlisle began to feel rather small, despite her firm resolves to feel nothing of the sort. She had heard something of this Mr. Pond in the past week: a person of some consequence in the world, it was said, several kinds of Doctor, and the author of a work on The Settlement which was considered “standard” and which Cally had meant (since last night) to purchase at Saltman’s bookstore. Report made him also a man of some independent means and position, and certainly he had come with excellent letters and credentials. But Cally did not consider that these things justified anybody in being so thoroughly hateful, particularly when you could see that it was only an eccentric pose....

“That,” said she, with dignity, “is what I am now considering—”

“But you’ve already offered to help! I merely request you, in a polite manner, to state how you can help me, in my big, serious and important work.... Doesn’t it occur to you, in fact, that you are somewhat helpless?”

“Does it occur to you that you are being somewhat rude?”

“Does it occur to *you* that what you call rudeness may be exactly the sort of wholesome irritant needed by people of your class?”

Page 82

“What do you mean by people of my class?”

Cally raised a white-gloved hand and put back a tendril of her gay hair. She looked at him level-eyed. The man’s constant and cocksure “I,” “me,” “mine,” rubbed her strongly the wrong way. This was Dr. Vivian’s Settlement, and nobody else’s. She was convinced that Vivian would have made a far better Director anyway....

Mr. Pond, however, smiled suddenly. The smile largely transformed his dark face, making it look for the first time quite agreeable, and even kind.

“I mean,” said he, “those who are highly ornamental, but cannot candidly be described as generally useful.”

The reply, for some reason, silenced her. She thought of Mrs. Page. The man’s smile faded.

“Not,” said he, “that I don’t consider ornaments of use. I do, in their place. Now I must get back to the firing-line. I can only add that if you are serious about wanting to help me, Miss—I’m afraid I didn’t catch your name—you will lose no time in qualifying yourself to be of service. Obviously you are not so qualified at present.”

He nodded curtly, and turned away. The admiring populace swallowed him up....

Cally felt as if she had received a severe drubbing. She felt rebuffed, defeated, depressed, and at the same time vaguely stimulated. However, the moment for introspective analysis was not now....

“Well, Cally,” said motherly Mrs. McVey, drifting by, “you must feel sort of lonesome—-such a turn-out of old folks I never saw. I wanted Evey to come, but she said she ’d as soon go to a tea at the Needy Ladies’ Home.”

On the heels of Evey’s mother came Cally’s own, whose watchful eye had been felt from a distance before now. Possibly mamma had not forgotten what happened the last time Cally came to the Dabney House....

“I saw you talking with Mr. Pond,” said Mrs. Heth, a little aside. “How did he impress you?”

“He’s the most conceited human being I ever saw,” said Cally. “I believe he said one or two fairly interesting things.”

“Well—that’s not a bad recommendation. I like an important man to think well of himself. I’ll ask him for my Settlement dinner Saturday, when those Cheritons stop nagging at him.”

Mamma looked slightly flushed beneath her fixed smile; a look which her daughter had no difficulty in understanding. More than once this afternoon, Cally had encountered significant stares upon herself, instantly removed, which showed with amusing candour that she was the subject of conversation in those quarters. No more could she assume that this conversation and those stares were but the involuntary offerings of the multitude to beauty and brilliant success. And yet she did not seem to mind so very much....

“I just gave my Settlement check to Mr. Byrd,” added mamma. “He was very grateful, but not as grateful as he ought to have been.”

She glided back to her position near the door. Mrs. McVey, chatting on, observed that the Pond man hadn’t seemed impatient to make her acquaintance, though she had waited round some time to give him the pleasure; also that there were no refreshments but ice-water from the new ten-gallon cooler in the hall. Then she, in her turn, passed on, as J. Forsythe Avery was discerned steering in a fixed direction through the crowd.

Page 83

“Are your labors ended so soon?”

Mr. Avery bowed pluperfectly, and Cally smiled suddenly. He was a pink, slightly bald young man, and had once been described by Mr. Berkeley Page as very gentlemanly.

“What are you laughing at?” inquired he, somewhat lugubriously.

“Only at something funny Mrs. McVey just said. You know how witty she is.... Have you handed them all out?”

“I appointed a deputy,” confessed Mr. Avery, “but I labored hard for a time. Am I not entitled to—er—the rewards of labor now?”

Cally glanced away, with no more desire to smile. The look in his pink eyes had arrested her attention, and she wondered whether she could possibly bring herself to take him. She was not wanted as a Settlement worker; and he would be colossally wealthy some day. Perhaps he lacked an indefinable something that comes from grandfathers, but he had never committed a social fault in his life, unless you would hold up against him an incurable fondness for just one tiny little drop of cologne on a pure linen handkerchief. Mamma would be rather pleased, poor dear.

Then her mind’s eye gave her a flashing memory-picture of Canning, the matchless, and Mr. Avery became unimaginable....

“Such as what?” said she, listlessly, to his roguish hints of reward.

“I should offer my escortage for—er—a small tour over the premises, and so forth. Why not?”

“No reason in the world, except that I may not go over the prem ...”

That word the speaker left forever unfinished. And her next remark was:

“What did you say?”

Obviously there was an interlude here; and in it Cally Heth had seen, and recovered from the sudden sight of, the strange young man Mr. V.V., upon whom her eyes had not fallen since a sunny May morning when she had sat and wept before him. He stood quite near, the founder of the Settlement, though in an obscure corner: backed there, it seemed, by a fat conversationalist in a purple bonnet. But there must have been telepathy in Cally’s gaze for her one confidant; for she had no sooner descried his tall figure through the fuss and feathers than he turned his eyes and looked at her.

She had considered with mingled feelings the prospect of meeting this man again to-day; and now the sight of his face and lucid gaze brought something of that sense of

shock which had attended these encounters in other days. Only now, twined with the painfulness of many associations which his look aroused, there was a sort of welcome, odd and unexpected; she felt a little start of gladness, as at the unlooked-for appearance of something trusted and familiar. How was it that she had thought so little of him in these months, through which it had seemed that there was nobody who understood?...

She bowed, in quite a bright and friendly way, putting down her inward disquiet; and then it was that, turning hastily again to the faithful Avery, Cally inquired:

Page 84

“What did you say?”

“I suggested,” said the pink and pluperfect one, “that you ought to see the gymnasium and swimming-pool at any rate. I’m informed that the pool is the largest in the State, and ...”

But Cally had seen that the man from another world was stepping out from his obscurity; and now there sounded above the Avery periods the vivid voice first heard in the summer-house.

“Miss Heth!—may I say how-do-you-do?... I hadn’t seen you till that moment. In fact, I had no idea you were here ...”

“Oh, yes, indeed. I’m a Life Member, if you please,” said Cally turning, looking again at the owner of that voice. “How do you do? Do you know Mr. Avery, Dr. Vivian?”

The two men bowed. Young Mr. V.V. had not long retained the slim hand which—such was his lot—had been offered to him for the first time in his life.

“Oh, Miss Kemper!” added Cally. “Do forgive me—I didn’t recognize your back at all. May I introduce Mr. Avery?...”

And then, while Mr. Avery paid reluctant devoirs to the lady in the purple bonnet, Cally said quite easily to Dr. Vivian:

“I was just debating whether or not to make an exploring expedition over the whole Settlement. Is there much to see?—or is it mostly rooms?”

“Oh, mostly rooms,” said Mr. V.V.

He seemed to begin a smile at this point, and then to change his mind about it. The smile, if such it was, ended short, as if clipped off.

“This door,” he added turning to the fresh-painted portal at his elbow, “leads to one of them.... A fair sample, I imagine. This one happens to be a—ah—a sort of sewing-class room, I believe....”

“Oh, a sewing-class room! That must be where I was offered a position.”

“Will you look at it?”

“I’d like to. Only I can’t sew a bit, you see....”

She stepped exploringly through the open door, into the sort of sewing-class room. V. Vivian walked after her; and behind him he distinctly heard the surprised and somewhat offended voice of the Kemper:

“Funny! I thought that was Mr. Pond I was talking to all the time.”

“It’s—it’s a very nice place,” said Cally, glancing about her as she advanced.

Not that it mattered, but it really was not a particularly nice place, only a rather dark and small chamber, smelling of paint and entirely empty save for one bench.

“Not a great deal to see, as you notice,” said the summer-house voice behind her, sounding somehow changed since last year.... “Not much of a class could sit on the bench, I fear. Or perhaps it’s this next room that’s for sewing.”

“Oh, I don’t mind,” said Cally.

And then she turned suddenly upon Mr. V.V., facing him, looking up with a sweet, half-wistful smile such as her face had never worn before for him.

“But tell me something about yourself.... What sort of summer have you had?”

Page 85

So he was brought to a halt, confronting in one of his donated rooms the loveliest of the Huns; confronting, but not looking at her exactly....

“Well, it’s been hot, as you know—in fact, the hottest summer since the Weather Bureau began. That wasn’t comfortable, of course. There was a good deal of suffering, where people couldn’t afford ice.... Personally, I’ve happened to be so busy that the weather didn’t matter—”

“That’s quite ominous, isn’t it, in a doctor? Has there been so much sickness in this neighborhood?”

“Yes, there’s been a lot of it. We had rather a bad typhoid epidemic, beginning in July—not easy to check in this old district, standing pretty much as it was before the war. I sometimes think there’s no hope of ever cleaning it out, short of a London fire.... I—I hope you’ve been well?”

“Oh, yes, quite well, thank you. But is this district so bad—from a health point of view?”

“You should see it,” said he, rather drily. “Or rather, of course, you shouldn’t. It’s more or less disturbing to one’s peace of mind at times....”

She was looking at him with an interested intentness of which she was quite unconscious. Never before had she seen this man free of the knowledge of menacing discussion ever pressing in the foreground; so now it was a little as if she met for the first time some one whom she had heard a great deal about from others. Her eye for externals had observed his new suit at once; in this deceptive light she considered that it looked quite nice, not suspecting that it was only the Prince, reduced; and she was thinking, with a sense of discovery, that Mr. V.V. was undoubtedly a good-looking man. A certain change in his manner she had also noted; a new touch of force, it seemed, a somewhat stiffened masculinity. What had become of that rather engaging hopeful look of his, which was the second thing she had ever noticed about him?...

“Perhaps I shall see it some day,” she answered. “If I ever become one of your Mr. Pond’s district visitors and investigators.”

“Are you thinking of doing that?”

“Oh, I offered to try to do something, but Mr. Pond declined me, without thanks. He said I was perfectly useless to him—in his big and serious work. The worst of it was,” she said, smiling rather ruefully, “he proved it.”

She was glancing toward the door, with the moving and humming groups beyond, and so missed the sudden eagerness that briefly lit his face.

“What part of the work—if I might ask—were you—specially interested in?”

“I suppose I’m not really interested in any part. That must be the trouble. Probably it’s just the usual dissatisfied feeling—when one is a little tired of parties....”

Was that not yet another confidence, clearly calling for an understanding listener, for sympathetic reassurance? Nothing of the sort came to Cally; nothing of any sort. The brief pause, sharpened as it was by Mr. V.V.’s oddly formal bearing, was rather like a cold douche. And now it seemed that she must have been counting on this man somehow all along, though it was not clear as to what....

Page 86

“So you see my peace of mind is quite safe. Mr. Pond is right, of course....” And then, thinking that this cool distance was rather absurd under the circumstances, she added in a friendlier way: “But why aren’t you the Director here, instead of Mr. Pond? I should think you would be, since it’s your Settlement.”

But the result of that was only to bring new stiffness into the strange young man’s manner.

“My Settlement!... Oh, I beg that you won’t speak or think of it in that way. I assure you I’ve nothing at all to do with it, other than as one worker out of many.”

Her unwarlike reply was: “Well, I haven’t told anybody.”

She glanced at him with a touch of bewilderment, and glanced away again, turning toward the door. Surely he had not always been like this....

“Mr. Avery will think I’m lost,” said Cally.

However, Mr. V.V. successfully checked her departure, saying:

“I’m sure you can be of the realest help to the Settlement, Miss Heth, if you care to be.” And, then, veering abruptly, he said with his air of making a plunge: “But I must take this opportunity to speak to you of another matter. A matter which, I fear, will be disagreeable to you.”

That sufficiently arrested her; she stood looking at him, with a conflict of sensations within. Faces of Settlementers appeared in the door, looked in at the bare room, passed from view again. The tall young man in the new suit pushed back his hair, with the quaint gesture he had.

“You once said,” he continued, in a voice of light hardness, “that I brought you nothing but trouble. That seems to continue true, though perhaps you won’t regard this as so—-so serious....”

Trouble? More trouble for Cally Heth?

“Why—what do you mean?”

“The question of the Heth Works—has come up again. That, at least, is the particular application. Of course many other factories are involved.”

The girl was completely taken aback. “Why, I don’t understand. What has come up?”

He then explained himself, in well-ordered sentences:

“The State Labor Commission feels strongly that the public good demands a new factory law at this time, requiring all owners to conform to a certain higher standard of comfort and safety for their employees. I must add that I fully share the Commission’s feeling. It is considered that some publicity in the press is needed, preparing the public mind for a progressive law by showing what present conditions are. A series of articles has been decided upon, to begin about the first of November and continue daily till the legislature meets in January. I have agreed to write these articles. I thought it only fair,” he ended short, “to tell you this.”

Page 87

The girl heard him with startled astonishment. She had never, of course, been interested in her father's factory other than as a family symbol; and that factitious interest which she had felt at times last year, born of this man's hostility, was gone long since, effaced by a tide of stronger feelings. So his sudden exhumation of the topic as a cause of war now came upon her with the harshest discordance. It seemed almost like a wanton wounding of her, somehow like sheer disloyalty in him. Surely if there were need of articles, this man might leave them to somebody else to write....

Her young gaze was full of an unconscious reproachfulness.

"All that means that you are going to put some more letters in the paper attacking my father?"

"I'm afraid it's inevitable it will seem so to you."

"Oh,"' said she, it seemed involuntarily, "I don't see how you *can*!"

The young man Mr. V.V. made no reply. It may be that he didn't see how he could either....

He looked away from the reproachful eyes, slate-blue to match the plumes in the hat: and there were phrases from his articles singing and kicking in his head, phrases which would cry in the penny newspaper as no voice could cry from the wilderness. Ten thousand words he had ready now, in the old secretary upstairs; hard words all, that broke heads or hearts, faiths implied too, it might be, and did not care; or didn't mean to show it if they did. And he thought, too, of a little friend he had, just pulled back from death's door, and hardly ready for her Trip now, after ten weeks. So of course there could be no flinching now....

Through the door there came the continuous sounds of the nearness of the multitude, but these two seemed almost as alone in his old hotel as they had been on another afternoon long ago.

"Don't you think," said the pretty voice, still not angry—and surely anger would have been easier to meet than this—"that before doing anything so—so radical as that, you might wait a little while, believing that my father would—do what is right?"

The lame doctor brought his eyes back to her and said, slowly: "You see, I've been worried by the feeling—that I've waited too long already."

"Too long for what? That's just what I mean. What do you think could possibly happen?"

"For one thing, Miss Heth," he said, with a faint dry smile, "the building might fall down some day."

Color came into Cally's cheek. Her feeling now was that she had made advances, spontaneous and friendly, and been smartly rebuffed. What cared he for the troubles of the Heths?...

"You really think my father would risk the lives of his employees, just to make a little more money for himself?"

He answered, almost brusquely: "I don't mean to judge your father. People take their views of life from the atmosphere in which they live. You appreciate that. I, of course, concede your father's point of view. I fully understand it. I—wish it were possible for you to do as much for mine."

Page 88

She looked at him fixedly a moment, said, “I’m sorry you think this necessary,” and turned away to the door. But once again his voice arrested her.

“Miss Heth!... You feel an interest in the Settlement. You’ve felt a wish to help in the work—to lend a hand in some way to those less fortunate than yourself. You—you haven’t as yet decided just what you want to do....”

She had paused at the door, half-turning; their eyes met once more. And now the whole look of the strange young man seemed to change, and he said with sudden gentleness:

“Why don’t you go to the Works some day?”

But it was late in the day to seek to improve matters with looks and tones, with efforts to put responsibilities upon her. Cally answered as she had answered him once before: only it was a mark of some change in her—toward him, perhaps toward life itself—that she spoke with a dignity which had never been hers last year.

“I don’t think I need do that to learn that my father isn’t a homicide.”

* * * * *

For the second time also, Cally went away from the Dabney House without the company of her staunch little mother: who would remain in this place till among the last, contending among the best people for the thing she held dearest in the world.

Cally, however, was well looked after by Mr. Avery, who welcomed her upon the threshold of the sewing-class room (if that is what it was), removing himself firmly from the Kemper. His proposal was to continue the tour of the premises, but she replied that she found Settlementing dreadfully boring, and was of a mind to steal away for home. The disappointed pink one then proposed to accompany her, and pay a little call, as he put it. However, she professed an incurable dulness after her slumming, and countered with an offer to set him down at his club, if he liked.

It was so arranged, with the gallant, and also with mamma. William Banks, detached by a nod from the procession of waiting vehicles over the dingy street, wheeled up to the entrance; halted with a whir; electrically self-started himself once more. Carlisle bowled off with J. Forsythe Avery, who was well pleased with this token of her regard, and resolved to make the most of it. But soon the time came when he was debarked from her conveyance; she was rid of his ponderous ardors; and Cally rolled through the twilight streets alone....

There had settled down upon her a deep and singular depression. Her spirit ached, as if from a whipping. She thought a little of the Works; she had remembered that moment of somewhat painful revelation last year; but no reflection brought any doubt of her father. Long since she had reached the sound conclusion that that was the way

business was; and if this fixed belief had been shaken a little now, she was hardly conscious of it. Papa, of course, did all that was reasonable and right for his work-people; it was perfectly outrageous that he should be subjected to abuse in the newspapers. Dr. Vivian, for his part, was conceded a religious fellow's strange sense of duty, though it required an effort to concede him that. Still Cally was not thinking of it from these points of view exactly. It all seemed to be quite personal, somehow....

Page 89

She gazed through the car-window at the familiar panorama, streets, houses, and people which she now did not see. It had been, indeed, an afternoon of snubs, such as she was hardly accustomed to receiving; and she seemed to have lost something of that wholesome defensive power she had possessed last year, the power of being righteously indignant. Time's whirligig had brought her to this,—that she had all but offered her friendship to Jack Dalhousie's friend, and he had more than repulsed her. She did feel indignant, a little; but, deeper than that, she felt wounded, she hardly knew why. After that moment of barrier-less intimacy in the drawing-room, how could he bear to be so hard?

Her vesper thoughts veered a little, moved from Vivian to Director Pond, who had also brusquely rebuffed her. It was Mrs. Page's experience that Cally had had this afternoon, and she too found it humiliating. She had lately caught a distant glimpse of "work" in terms different from those which the dull word had worn heretofore: vaguely discerned activities in which the best women were cooeperating usefully with men—-cooeperating equally as human beings, and no nonsense; not as women at all. There was something mysteriously inviting in this. She had felt a bracing absence of sex in Pond's hectoring catechism and blunt rejection of her. Yes, and in the cool declaration of war from Dr. Vivian, who had grown so hard since May. Busy and serious beings these, who would not be deterred by the flutterings of the doubtless ornamental but completely useless....

"You're to go back for Mrs. Heth, William."

"Yas'm," said William, and clicked the little door behind her.

Yes, and where there was no sex, there she, Cally Heth, wasn't wanted. Hard words these, but they seemed to have the ring of truth. She was wanted as a woman, she was wanted as an ornament, but she appeared to have no particular purpose as a human being. And the best prospect that life held out to her to-night was to settle down in a weary world as Mrs. J. Forsythe Avery.

Cally opened the front door, which was hospitably kept on the latch during the daytime, and stepped into the dim hall of home. Rarely in her life had she felt more dispirited. Nevertheless, when she heard a footfall from the direction of the drawing-room, and was reminded that papa had already come in, her combative blood plucked up at once. She wanted to tell her father immediately that he was going to be attacked in the papers; never fear but he would know what to do about it.

"Papa!" she called. "Where are you? I ..."

Speaking, she had put her head through the drawing-room portieres, rehung that very day: and so it was that her sentence was never ended in this world. For it was not papa who turned so quickly at the sound of her voice, and came walking so straight and

sure towards her. Not papa, this splendid and once well-admired figure, now confronting her with such unmistakable feeling. No, the wonder of all wonders had happened; and the universe seemed to hang in momentary suspense as Cally Heth looked again into the eyes of her prince of lovers.

Page 90

“Carlisle,” said Hugo’s remembered voice, “I’ve come back.”

She stood unmoving in the doorway, her fingers tightening on the silken hanging. Her breast was in a tumult of emotions, in which a leaping exultation was not wanting. But stronger than anything else in this moment was the uprushing feeling that here was one whom she had well trusted once, and who had failed her in her direst need.

“So I see,” said she.

And continuing to look fixedly at him as he advanced upon her, beginning to speak, she was shot through with a bitter thought:

“He’s found I’m not so badly damaged after all.”

XXV

In which the Name of Heth is lifted beyond the Reach of Hateful Malice, and Mamma wishes that she had the Ten Thousand back again.

Mrs. Heth returned from the Settlement “opening” a full hour behind Carlisle, and in a victorious glow such as she had not known since May. Doing good for cause, she was not one to blush too much to find it fame. Having notified Mr. Byrd of her ten thousand dollar gift to the Foundation Fund, she had proceeded with her tidings to others of the authorities, and presently met with appreciation in proportion to the funds involved. Director Pond, a decisive and forthright man, had stood upon a chair and cried the splendid donation to the assembled company, his obvious moral being that others similarly prospered by the Lord should go and do likewise. So had come vindicatory advertisement gorgeous beyond the little lady’s dreams.

It was well that the world should mark this gift, for it had not been made by the mere scratching of a signature. And the colloquies preceding it had been of a thoroughly typical sort, compressing in a nutshell a whole history, in fact the whole history, of the domestico-commerical relationships of rising Houses. Settlementers might have applauded more heartily had they understood just what a deep-cutting business they were witnessing. However, they did not understand this, and Mrs. Heth, for her part, was the last person in the world to moralize upon the non-essential. Returning homeward through the night, rolling eclat beneath her tongue, she frankly reflected that it was worth the money. The envious would hardly be able to conceive that people who gave so magnificently to charity could have done anything really deserving of censure; no, no. Or, if such people imaginably had, then certainly the only thing to do was to forget all about it as quickly as possible....

So agreeably musing, Mrs. Heth arrived at the door of the House, and received upon the threshold the great surprise of her life.

It was almost seven o'clock, so long had she lingered to enjoy and capitalize the reverberations of her triumph. Yet Carlisle, singularly enough, was discovered standing in the hall, still in her hat and gloves, just as she had left the reception an hour earlier.

Page 91

Full as Mrs. Heth was of her own engrossing thoughts, her daughter's expression at once notified her that she, too, had news of some sort to communicate.

"Well, Carlisle? What're you.... Why, what's happened?"

"You've just missed Hugo, mamma."

"*Hugo!*" said mamma, paling and almost falling backward. "He's *been* here?"

In her daughter's blue eyes there lingered that gleaming exultation, not completely softened as yet by the sweeter and now due love-light.

"He wants me to marry him next month."

"Oh, *Cally!*..."

Fairly tumbling forward from the door, Mrs. Heth gathered her daughter in a convulsive bear-hug, murmuring ecstatic nothings. Little she thought of Settlements or picayunish donations now.

"Oh, Cally!... Mamma's so happy for you, dear child!... And me never dreaming he was within a thousand miles! All's well that ends well, *I* say!... When'd he come? I'm wild to see him. Where's he staying? Will he be back this evening?"

She drew away from her unwonted demonstration, leaving her hands on Cally's shoulders, and the two women looked at each other, both a little flushed with excitement.

"He's at the Arlington, to stay only till to-morrow," said she, "and he's coming in after dinner to see you and papa."

"Oh!... He insists on not seeing you, I suppose?" fleered mamma, with enormous archness.

"I won't be here, you see. I'm going to the theatre—Mr. Avery's getting up a party."

Mrs. Heth showed as much surprise as the jubilation of her countenance could accommodate.

"Why, my dear child! Break it, of course! I'll telephone him myself—a friend from out of town—"

"But I don't want to break it, you see!" said Carlisle, laughing brightly. "He can't expect to drop in after months and months and find us all twirling our thumbs on the doorstep, you know!"

"But you're *engaged to him.*'"

"I should hope *not!*... Why, *mamma!* You must think I'm frightfully—die-away!... I'm *disciplining* him, don't you see? I'm not going to make it too easy for him!"

"Oh!... I see!"

Perhaps she did not see exactly, and certainly she did not believe in manufacturing sporting chances in the most momentous matter in the world. But then neither did Cally, she well knew; and of her daughter's victorious skill in the matter of managing men, she had had many proofs, and now this crowning one. Lovers' coynesses mattered little in the face of the supreme fact of Canning's return.

"Well! You'll give him the whole day to-morrow, of course!... And don't you be too hard on the dear fellow, Cally. His coming back shows he's been disciplined.... How the cats will open their eyes!"

"Probably.... But don't worry about Hugo, mamma. He'll do just what I say after this."

Page 92

Mamma laughed delightedly. She was of course in the woman's league for the general putting down of the enemy, Man. The two women stood staring at each other in the stately hall.

"*Next month!*" said mamma. "We can't do it, Cally! November would be better—much better—just before Thanksgiving, don't you think?"

Cally laughed merrily, and extricated herself.

"We'll have plenty of time to decide about *that*.... Now, I must fly and dress. I shan't have time for dinner, mamma. Will you send me up something—just some soup and coffee?"

"Certainly, darling," said mamma.

Already there had crept a certain absentness into the campaigner's voice. Her strong, constructive mind was slipping away from this present, measuring over the triumphs that lay ahead. After her darling vanished upstairs, she remained standing motionless by the newel-post, in her fixed eyes the gleam of a brigadier-general who has pulled out brilliant victory over overwhelming obstacles. The god in the machine had, indeed, forever put the name of Heth beyond the reach of hateful malice....

Suddenly mamma said aloud, rather indignantly: "I wish I had that ten thousand back!"

In her own room, Cally bathed, dressed at some speed, and dined lightly between whiles. She was in a state of inner exaltation, contrasting oddly with her depression two hours earlier. Obliterated now was her conviction of her own human uselessness in a world of sexes, though it couldn't be said that anything had happened to disprove that conviction, exactly. In this moment she was continuously elated by all that was signified in the fact that Hugo Canning was to spend the evening downstairs talking decorously with mamma and papa while she, Cally, loved of him, was to go off to the theatre with J. Forsythe Avery....

If Canning had failed her in her greatest need, time, indeed, had exquisitely avenged her. The Lord of the righteous had delivered the prince of lovers into her hand. With his very first words in the dim drawing-room, Hugo had admitted, for the second time in their somewhat stormy courtship, his unconditional surrender. He made no mistake this time about the nature of a woman's heart; he was not logical or controversial or just; but advancing straight upon her over her decidedly forbidding greeting, he had spoken out with evident emotion:

"Don't look at me that way—I can't bear it.... Don't you know *now* that I love you? I love you so that I won't live without you."

Yes, Cally did know it now. She had clearly wronged both Hugo and herself in ever thinking of him as a male flirt, a light-loving jilt who too easily found balm for a heart not made for deep hurts. Busy and gay with her dressing, Carlisle thought of the Honorable Kitty Belden, and laughed musically to herself.

Page 93

Yet how was it that, under so manly and sweet an appeal straight to her woman's heart, she had not instantly subsided on the shoulder of her contrite lover, with grateful tears? Cally herself hardly understood. She was, truth to tell, secretly surprised and thrilled by her own high-handedness. To what degree she and her former betrothed had remet under permanently changed conditions, it was beyond her thought to try to analyse now. Perhaps it was only the completeness of her triumph that had so fired her feminine independence. Had she met Hugo by chance, and found him lukewarm, doubt not that she would have striven to fan the embers....

She had followed her intuitions, which never reason, and when she said that she was now disciplining her prodigal, she spoke out her actual feelings as far as she herself understood them; feelings, they were, which had a deep root far back in all the summer's unhappiness. There was a sentence of Hugo's last May: *"I asked one girl to be my wife; have you the right to offer me another?"* She would make Hugo pay a little more for that remark, now that she could just as easily as not.

Like Aaron's rod, the return of Canning had swallowed up all other facts of the girl's existence, or nearly all. She was lifted, as on wings, out of the slough of her despond. Nevertheless, the news heard at the Settlement recurred even now; and when Mrs. Heth appeared in the bedroom, just after eight, Carlisle greeted her with:

"Has papa gone out, mamma?"

Mamma said no, papa was in the study, though Mr. MacQueen was with him just at the moment. Something about installing some new machines at the Works, she believed....

"That will do, Flora—Miss Carlisle has everything she needs...." And then the good lady said, with a smile so knowing as to amount to a tremendous wink: "You are going to tell your father to-night.... That's right, my dear—"

Cally gave a burst of gay laughter, declaring that there was not one earthly thing to tell.

"Of course, darling, mamma understands," said that lady, promptly, with her unconquerable beam.

And a few moments later she added:

"Cally, I was just thinking—no harm in being forehanded, as I always say!... Considering all the circumstances, what would you say to a small, dignified home-wedding, with two or four bridesmaids, and a large breakfast to the most intimate friends?"

Cally was even more amused....

There hovered over her in this moment, however clearly she knew it, an immense pressure, born both within and without—pressure of her own lifelong mental habits and ideals, of her parents' wishes, strengthened by the family's late loss of prestige, pressure of public opinion, of orthodox standards, of manifest destiny, of the whole air she breathed—driving her, quite irrespective of the heart question, straight to brilliant success in Hugo's waiting arms. The wing of this vast body brushed Cally's cheek now, in mamma's cooing notes. She felt it, but only smiled. A new strength possessed her; she was her own girl now as never before.

Page 94

"I'll give the suggestion due thought, mamma dear ... I've an engagement now."

Annie knocked, announcing Mr. Avery. Cally was now fully accoutred, in a small, queer hat, and a short queer wrap, draping in fantastically above the knee and made of a strange filmy material which might have been stamped chiffon. She turned, laughing, at the bedroom door, and her mother, no sentimentalist, thought that she looked extraordinarily pretty....

"Good-night, mamma.... *Be sure to remember me to Hugo.*"

She went off to a merry evening in which her high spirits became a matter of remark, and her friend Evey McVey considered that they were the least bit out of taste—"so soon, you know." So Hugo Canning spent the evening of his return formally reinstating himself in the good graces of papa, who did not forget his daughter's unhappiness of the summer quite so easily as mamma....

But next day Hugo had his innings, according to Mrs. Heth's desire.

He had been in Washington, and had come to Carlisle upon an irresistible impulse. Steadily magnetized by the spirit of the "wild, sweet thing" who had withstood him at the price of his hand, yearning had once more conquered pride, and again he had returned, again an astonishment to himself. In view of such abasement of his self-love, he had, truth to tell, expected to find Carlisle fully ready for the immediate rejoining of their lives. But perhaps there had lingered in him a doubt of the quality of his reception, born of the manner of their parting; and her hesitation, while it shook his vanity, by no means bade him despair. After the first small shock, he had not failed to perceive the coyness of her; and why not? If her maiden's whim demanded a brief ritual of probationary wooing before verbally admitting him to her heart again, never fear but he would go through his paces with a gallant's air....

The day was what photographers call cloudy-bright, turning toward mid-afternoon into fitful sunshine. The young pair lunched *a deux* at the Country Club, nearly deserted at this hour on a week-day. Hugo had stoutened the least bit under his sorrows; he was more masculine, handsomer than ever; his manner did not want his old lordliness, even now. He was not one to discuss business with a woman, but she learned of the affair which was hurrying him back to Washington, nothing less than rate-hearings before the Interstate Commerce Commission, if you please. The able young man was now assistant counsel for his father's railway. However, he was to pass this way soon again, probably next week.

They sat for an hour on the club piazza looking out over smooth rolling hills, now green, now wooded, all fair in the late September sunshine. Away to the left there was the faint gleam of the river. All day Canning, in his subtle way, made love to Cally, but he was too wise to press hard upon her girlish hesitancy.

“I don’t believe you’ve missed me much,” he remarked, once, on the wooing note. “Have you?”

Page 95

Cally smiled into space and answered: "At times."

"That's cheerful ... When there's not been an hour for me, all summer, I swear it, that hasn't been singing with thoughts of you."

"You might have run up from Trouville, in July, and called on us in Paris."

His reply indicated that running, whether up or down, involved a considerable conquest of pride. And Cally understood that.

"I," said she, tranquilly, "have been growing weary of society. Perhaps that is your doing...."

She told him of her experience at the Settlement yesterday, of her rebuff at the hands of Mr. Pond. Canning thanked heaven that she need not bother herself with such dreary faddisms of the day.

"You can safely leave all that," said he, "to the women who have failed in their own careers."

"And what career is that?"

"The career of being a woman. Need you ask?"

Carlisle, drawing on her gloves, observed: "That would bring up the question, wouldn't it, of what your ideal of a woman is."

"For five cents," said Hugo, "I will tell you her name."

She was pleased with the evidences of her mastery over him. The day of intimacy brought its reactions, automatically creating romantic airs. When the time came for him to go, she was sorry; and perhaps just a little uncertain in her own mind. For the re-engagement had still not taken place. The most that could be said was that an "understanding" existed, to the effect that it would take place on his return. And Canning, for his part, was not dissatisfied with this arrangement. In ten days he would come again, and take the wavering outposts by storm.

They said good-bye in the drawing-room at home, at quarter before five. Cally held out her slender little hand. Hugo smiled down at it: surely, between him and her, an odd farewell. But then, as his clasp tightened, the man's smile became a little twisted on his handsome lip.

"When I part from you again, my dear," said he, with sudden huskiness, "I swear it won't be like this."

The girl looked up at him. He raised the hand, palm-upward, with a sort of jerk, kissed it, dropped it abruptly, and was gone.

Cally remained standing where he had left her; this time she did not run to the window. She glanced at the hand which her lover had just saluted, and was conscious of a subtle want in their reunion....

Hugo's presence in the body had brought up vividly that matter upon which they had broken in May. Of that matter he had said nothing, either yesterday or to-day. His manner and bearing took the clear position that he and she had simply had a lovers' quarrel, in which both had said and done things that they did not mean. But Jack Dalhousie had stood in the background of Carlisle's mind all day, and her feeling was that something rather definite should have been said about him. Possibly Mrs. Berkeley Page had something to do with this; that lady had left behind her an indefinable suggestion of invisible standards, of appraisements differing from mamma's, say. Measuring herself unconsciously with Hugo to-day, Cally had become aware that in carrying out her will in opposition to his last year, she had derived, not merely strategic, but in some way personal, strength. The old inequality had mysteriously disappeared....

Page 96

Mrs. Heth came gliding through the portieres from the hall. Her face was one vast inquiry, lit by beams; it made an uproarious demand such as a child of three could have understood. Still, to avoid any possibility of misunderstanding, mamma briefly gave voice:

“Well?”

Cally laughed, and held up her betrothal finger, which was unadorned.

“I’m not,” said she.

Mamma’s face fell.

“Don’t look so blank!” said the daughter, with a little laugh and shrug. “It’s all going to happen next week, by the book.... Don’t you know I’m perfectly safe?”

* * * * *

Mr. Heth heard Cally’s business news with open indignation. She made her report to him that night, just after dinner; and she saw her father’s business manner emerge sharply from beneath his genial domesticity.

The “new law” was an old story to the owner of the Cheroot Works. He kept apprised of the signs of the times; and he happened to know in some detail the provisions of the pernicious legislation the Labor Commissioner was cooking up in secret,—“that’d confiscate two years’ profits from every near mill in town,” said MacQueen. But the rest was news, and highly unwelcome news. To fight blackmail legislation against progressive business was comparatively simple; but a string of lies in the newspapers made a more insidious assault, injuring a man’s credit, his standing as a conservative financier, his ability to inspire “confidence”: valuable possessions to the President of the Fourth National Bank, and already indefinably impaired by the sensational family matter last spring....

“Vivian!—That fellow!” he exclaimed, recalling not only the Severe Arraignment, but the cataclysm in the House....

“Why, Cally! I thought you considered him sort of a friend of yours!”

“Not that, exactly,” said Cally, at a considerable loss. “Still, I was very much surprised.... Do you mind about the—the articles, particularly, papa?”

“I do.”

“Isn’t there something you can do—to have it all stopped? Couldn’t you have a suit—or—?”

Her father exploded. She had touched a sore point.

“Sue! Sue a lot of paupers that haven’t got a shirt to their backs! Put ‘em in prison?—-likely with a lot more paupers on the jury, thinkin’ a successful business man’s anybody’s meat. *Sue*!—and what’ll you get? I’ll tell you! An impudent—offensive—-malicious muckraking of your own private business....”

Cally, looking at papa’s indignant face, felt much drawn to him. However, the business conversation was here interrupted, Cally being called away to the telephone. She went, wondering intently if she could not somehow help in this threatened trouble. She had felt an impulse toward doing something useful. What more useful than assisting to shield her father from undeserved abuse?...

“It’s only me, Cally,” said Henrietta Cooney’s voice, “or I, as they’ve got it in the grammars. I just called up to tell you not to forget the meeting to-morrow.”

Page 97

“What meeting, Hen?”

“I see I did well to call,” came over the wire, on the wings of the Cooney laugh. “The Saturday meeting at the Woman’s Club, cousin, that I engaged you for the other day. I’ve just heard that V.V.’s going to speak, too, which made me want you specially. Don’t say no.”

“Of course not. I want to go, very much.”

The two girls lingered a moment to chat. Henrietta appeared characteristically cheerful, though reporting half the family sick, and Cousin Martha Heth quite low in mind with her flatfoot. And Cally’s manner to her poor relation was quite friendly to-night, without any special effort. Her summer-time suspicion that Hen was actually trying to “cheer her up” had by now become a certainty (Hen did not know about Hugo, of course); and which of her own girlhood intimates had done as much? Further, the words of comfort that the hard-worked stenographer had said to her, the day she got home from Europe, had recently been endorsed, as it were, in a most distinguished quarter. A strange thought this, that there was a point of similarity between Hen Cooney and Mrs. Berkeley Page....

But when Cally left the telephone she was not thinking of these things at all. She was thinking that to-morrow she would both hear and see Dr. Vivian, her father’s enemy, the hard religious fellow who could so easily forget the troubles of others. Her duty on the occasion seemed to become quite clear to her. She must speak to him, try to induce him to give up his newspaper articles, or at least to leave her father’s name out of them.

The day of lovers’ reunion was somewhat blurred by ending with thoughts such as these. Hugo, as Carlisle had said, could not pop back after months, and repossess her mind and heart at a bound. He did it pretty successfully during the evening, while she entertained Robert Tellford and James Bogue, 2d, who cordially hated each other, in the drawing-room. But before she fell asleep that night, Cally’s thoughts had turned more than once to, V. Vivian, of the old hotel which was now a Settlement. Why had he asked her to go to the Works some day, and why had he done it with that strange look?

XXVI

Concerning Women who won’t remember their Place, and a Speech to Two Hundred of them, by Mr. V.V., no less; also revealing why Hen Cooney never found V.V. in the Crowd around the Platform.

It was an interesting time to be alive, as Hen Cooney remarked again next day. Absorbing matters were afoot in the old town, provided that you had an eye in your head to see them. One thing led to another with startling rapidity. Only the other day, it seemed, some one had risen and flung against the ideals of generations the discordant cry of Votes for Women. Rebukes for the unseemliness were copious and stern

enough. Many spoke acidly of the lengths to which childless females would go for lack of occupation. Droll fellows of a pretty wit giggled and asked who

Page 98

would mind the baby while the madam went out to vote. Serious-minded persons of both sexes disposed of the whole foolishness forever by saying (and wondering why nobody had ever thought of it before) that woman's place was the home. But few there were who perceived a symptom here; not even when the League grew with unintelligible rapidity, and croaking diagnosticians here or there professed to see other manifestations not unrelated.

Cassandras remarked that women wearied of thinking "through their husbands." The census revealed to the close student that some women even had no husbands. It was a fact that year before last women had appeared at legislative "hearings" for the first time in the history of the State. These women, plague on them, failed to fortify the wags by powdering their noses in front of pocket mirrors while they talked, or making sweet-eyes at the chairmen of committees. They appeared, to tell the honest truth, with late reference-books under their arms, and in their heads the faculty for asking the most annoying sort of questions. More than one honest Solon was seen to stammer and turn red under their interrogations, so often stiffened by a date and a little figure or so.

And these troublesome "thinking women" had not retired when the legislature did. Editors nowadays were often surprised in their sanctums by committees of three from some pestiferous unwomanly club or other, and they had not come, alackaday, to have their handkerchiefs picked up with courtly speeches, graced with an apt quotation from "Maud." The Civic Improvement League, with a woman president, was taking a continuous interest in matters of playgrounds and parks, clean streets and city planning. The Society for Social Progress, almost exclusively feminine, was continuously astir about pure milk and factory laws, birth-rates and infant mortality, sociology and eugenics. And now here was the conservative Woman's Club, which had been purely literary and social for a quarter of a century, holding a largely attended symposium on How Shall We Help the Poor?

This latter meeting, attended by Carlisle Heth and her cousin Henrietta the day after Canning left, was no doubt a trivial and obscure occurrence. Not an earthly thing could be said for it, except that it was a bubble on the surface of an unrest which would one day change the face of human society....

The two cousins, having come a little tardy, were content with seats in the next to the last row. The Woman's Club inhabited an old family mansion on Washington Street,—-bought in the legendary age when land was not computed by the square foot,—and its assembly-rooms were the one-time parlors, with the dining-room thrown in by an architectural dexterity. Perhaps two hundred women could be seated here, and all seemed to be present to-day. Cally regarded serried rows of feminine backs, some of which she recognized. The little platform at the farther end of the rooms remained empty, and the place was abuzz with murmured talk. Not a back was silent, not even

Henrietta's. Hen was saying enthusiastically that nothing like this could have been seen ten years ago....

Page 99

Cally caught widening glimpses of the Cooney meanings. She had been like a rider thrown from a gay fixed steed in a merry-go-round, who, having picked himself up and mended his wounds, looks about, and gets his first view of the carousel as part of a larger moving scene. Cally, for the first time in her life, had been glancing over the fair-grounds. Not even the knowledge of Hugo's love could now wholly turn her gaze backward.

Pending the beginning of the oratory, clubbers and guests talked to the contentment of their hearts. Cally said suddenly:

"Hen, why is it that men are so opposed to this sort of thing?"

"It's human," said Hen, "if you have the upper hand, not to want to give it up."

"You mean that men have the upper hand now?"

"Haven't they?"

A tiny little woman in the row ahead of them turned round and smiled faintly at Henrietta. She had a face like a small doll's, a button of a nose and the palest little china-blue eyes imaginable. Nevertheless, this woman was Mrs. Slicer, president of the Federation of Women's Clubs, and those weak eyes had once stared a Governor of a State out of countenance.

"Hen, they have," said she, in a fairy voice; and so turned back to her own affairs, dropping from these pages.

Henrietta presently said: "But why should they oppose it, really, Cally? If you were a man, would you insist on the privilege of marrying a helpless dependent, your mental and moral inferior? Seems to me I'd rather have an intelligent comrade, my superior for choice—"

But Hen discovered that her voice all at once sounded very loud. There was a sudden lull in the conversational hum, and then a burst of hand-clapping. The lady president of the Woman's Club had entered at the head of the rooms, followed by the orators. They ascended the platform; and when Cally saw but the Mayor of the city and Mr. Pond of the Settlement, she said at once to Henrietta:

"Why, where's your friend V.V.?"

"Somewhere up at the front,—I *hope*!... He wasn't one of the regular speakers, you know...."

Hen added in a faint whisper: "I doubt if he knows he's going to be called on—"

Being duly presented to the expectant women, his Honor the Mayor spoke first. He was a middle-aged, mustachioed Mayor, who had achieved a considerable success by being all things to a few men, but those the right ones. His reputation as an orator was well deserved, but his ability to make one speech serve many occasions had been commented upon by carpers here and there. See the files of the "Post," *passim*. To-day his thesis was organized charity, lauded by him, between paragraphs of the set piece, as philanthropy's great rebuke to Socialism. And thrice his Honor spoke of the glorious capital of this grand old commonwealth; twice his arm swept from the stormy Atlantic to the sun-kissed Pacific; five times did he exalt, with the tremolo stop, the fair women of the Southland....

Page 100

“The dinner-bell of the house!” said Hen, *sotto voce*, as the orator sat down, smiling tiredly amid familiar applause. “Don’t be discouraged yet, Cally.”

Director Pond, having been most flatteringly introduced, received an ovation, half for the man and his work, half from the wish of a kindly people to bid the stranger welcome. He spoke half as long as the Mayor, and said four times as much: so much space did he save by saying nothing whatever about the fair women of the Southland, and by absolutely avoiding all metaphors, tropes, synecdoches, or anacolutha. Mr. Pond assaulted the Mayor’s apotheosis of charity, particularly as applied to his own institution. He described the Settlement, not as a dispensary for old clothes, but as a cultivated personality, an enlightened elder brother gone to live with the poor. It aspired to enrich life through living, said he, to bring light to the disinherited and the gift of a wider horizon....

Mr. Pond followed his thought with more imagination than one might have thought him to possess, and with a glow on his dark face such as had not been observed there the other day. Cally, from the next to the last row, listened attentively enough; she recalled that she would see Mr. Pond this evening, perhaps sit next to him, at mamma’s Settlement dinner. However, she reserved her chief interest for Hen’s friend V.V., who was so merciless in his attitude toward those who were not poor. Mr. Pond spoke straightforwardly, not to say bluntly. But she pictured Vivian as shaking the rafters with his shameless homicides and God-pity-yous....

“Once the bread and meat question’s settled, money is of secondary importance,” said the Director’s deep voice. “Let’s get that well into our heads. What the poor ask is that they shall not be born under disadvantages which the labor of their lifetimes can never remove....”

Only these two speakers had been announced. When Pond sat down the formal exercises were over. But as his applause died away, the president of the club rose again, sure enough,—while Henrietta excitedly nudged Carlisle,—and announced an added speaker, a guest of the club to-day, whom she described as the young father of the Settlement. The president—a tall, placid-faced woman, with a finely cut chin and a magnificent crown of silver hair—had something to say about the spirit of pure idealism; and was sure that the members would be glad to hear remarks on the subject of the day from young Dr. Vivian, the missionary doctor of the Dabney House....

The few kind words elicited somewhat perfunctory plaudits, despite Hen Cooney’s single-handed attempt to stampede them into a triumph. The Clubbers, truth to tell, were by now disposed to leave oratory and the uplift for small-talk and tea.

“*There he is*!” said Hen, clapping splendidly.

Page 101

V. Vivian stood on the platform, beside a tall oak-stand and a water-pitcher, gazing out over phalanxes of women. His youthfulness was a matter of general notice. By contrast with the Mayor's seamy rotundity and Pond's powerful darkness, he looked, indeed, singularly boyish and fair. He was undoubtedly pale, and his face wore an odd look, a little confused and slightly pained. This, combined with his continuing silence, gave rise to a general suspicion that the young man had fallen a victim to stage-fright. However, the odd struggle going on in him at his unexpected opportunity was not against fear....

Carlisle regarded Vivian intently, over and through scores of women's hats. She was inwardly braced for epithets. Somewhere in the air she heard the word "anarchist"; but a woman sitting near her said, quite audibly,—"*Looks* more like a *poet*," ... meaning, let us hope, like a poet as we like to think that poets look; and not as they so often actually look, by their pictures in the magazines....

"I suppose the beginning of helping the poor," suddenly spoke up the young man on the stand, in a voice so natural and simple as to come as a small shock, "is to stop thinking of them as the poor. There are useful people in the world, and useless people; good people and bad people. But when we speak of poor people and rich people, we only make divisions where our Maker never saw any, and raise barriers on the common which must some day all come down."

The speaker pushed back his blond hair with a gesture which Cally Heth had seen before. However, all else about him, from the first sight, had seemed to come to her in the nature of a surprise....

"The things in which we are all alike," said the tall youth, with none of the Mayor's oratorial thunder, "are so much bigger than the things in which we are different. What's rich and poor, to a common beginning and a common end, common sufferings, common dreams? We look at these big freeholds, and money in bank is a little thing. On Washington Street, and down behind the Dabney House—don't we each alike seek the same thing? We want life, and more life. We want to be happy, and we want to be free. Well—we know it's hard to win these prizes when we're poor, but is it so easy when we're rich? To live shut off on a little island, calling the rest common and unclean—is that being happy and free, is it having life abundantly? I look around, and don't find it so. And that's sad, isn't it?—double frustration, the poor disinherited by their poverty, the rich in their riches.... Don't you think we shall find a common meeting-place some day, where these two will cancel out?... when reality will touch hands with the poet's ideal—

> "And the stranger hath seen in the stranger his brother at last,
> And his sister in eyes that were strange..."

The slum doctor paused. The confused appearance was gone from his face; he looked now introspective, quite without consciousness of himself; rather like a man listening with somewhat dreamy approbation to the words of another. And Cally, having felt her antagonism mysteriously slipping away from the moment her eyes rested upon his face, now knew, quite suddenly and definitely, that she wasn't going to speak to him about the articles.

Page 102

The knowledge, the whole matter, was curiously disturbing to her. Where was the hostile hardness of the religious fellow, justifying distrust and dislike? Why should her father's attacker make her think now, of all times, of that night in Hen's parlor, the morning on Mr. Beirne's doorstep, that rainy May-day in his Dabney House when he had overwhelmed her with the knowledge of his superiority?...

"And—and—I think women should be especially interested in all that makes for a new common freedom," observed the youthful speaker, "for they have suffered somewhat in that way—haven't they?... [Applause, led by Miss Cooney.] You know the processes of history—how men, first of all by superior muscle, have made it a man's world.... Till to-day, large groups of women find themselves cribbed and cabined to a single pursuit, marriage: surely the noblest of all callings, but—perhaps you will agree with me—the meanest of all professions. I, for one, am glad to see women revolting from this condition, asking something truer, something commoner, than chivalry. For that, I say, steps the march to the great goal, a boundless commonwealth, a universal republic of the human spirit. It seems to me we need to socialize, not industry, but the heart of Man to his brother. Rich and poor, men and women—God, I am sure of it, meant us all to be citizens of the world...."

A certain self-consciousness seemed here to descend upon the tall orator. He ceased abruptly, and disappeared from the platform, having neglected to make his bow to the chairman.

Then the moment's dead silence was suddenly exploded with a burst of clapping, quite as hearty as Mr. Pond had received, and really something like the "storm" we read about. And in the din, Henrietta Cooney was heard crying, with a passion of pride:

"Well, it's about *time*!... It's the first thing V.V.'s ever got—the first *tribute*.... A boy like that—"

Hen, curiously, was winking a little as the two girls rose. And she added in a moved voice, as if seeking to explain herself:

"Well, think of the hard life he has down there, Cally,—no pleasure, no fun, no companionship.... And this is the first notice of *any kind* ..."

The meeting was over. The crowded parlors were in a hubbub. Colored servants entered, taking away the camp-chairs. A general drift toward the platform was in evidence. And Cally, standing with the others and ready to go, seemed to see no clear course at all among the disturbing cross-currents which she suddenly felt within her, impelling her now this way, now that. If she could not think of V. Vivian as hard now, exactly, a new "attitude" was obviously needed, consistent with her duty to papa. It must be that the strange young man was obsessed by beautiful but impossible ideas

about the equality of the poor and so on. Carried away by excessive sympathies, he took wild extreme views....

Page 103

“Are you going to stay for tea, Hen?” she asked, amid the stir and vocal noises of two hundred women.

But Hen said no; getting tea for the Cooney invalids was her portion.

“We’ll just stop a minute and speak to V.V.,” she added, as if that went without saying.

But this time Cally said no, somewhat hastily. And then she explained that she must go home to dress, as mamma was having some people to dinner to-night. Hen looked disappointed.

“Well, there’s no chance of getting near him now, anyway. Look at that jam around the platform.... Stay just a minute or two, Cally.”

The two cousins, the rich and the poor, and looking it, strolled among the Clubbers, Henrietta speaking to nearly everybody, and invariably asking how they had liked Dr. Vivian’s speech, Pond and the Mayor ignored. She also introduced her cousin right and left, and enjoyed herself immensely.

Cally, having matters to think about, again remarked that she must go. She saw Hen glance hungrily over the dense lively crowd, densest around the platform, and promptly added: “But of course you mustn’t think of coming with me.”

Henrietta hesitated. “You wouldn’t mind if I stayed on a minute? I *would* like just to say a word to V.V.”

Cally assured her. “And thank you for bringing me, Hen. I—had no idea it would be so interesting.”

The two girls parted. Hen plunged into the Clubbers to speak to Mr. V.V. Cally went out of the great doors, deep in thought. And having passed through these doors, the very first person she saw was Mr. V.V....

It was incredible, but it was true. How he had escaped the handshakers was a mystery for a detective. But there the man indubitably stood at the head of the Club steps, alone in the gathering twilight, bowing, speaking her name....

Had he been waiting for her, then? A certain air of prepared surprise in his greeting rather suggested the thought.

“Is your car waiting?” inquired the orator, courteously. “May I call it for you?”

Cally’s heart had jumped a little at the sight of his tall figure, but she answered easily enough, as she moved toward the steps, that she was walking.

“Then won’t you allow me to see you home?... It’s getting rather dark. And I—the fact is, I wanted to speak to you.”

And Cally said, far from what she had planned to say in thinking of this meeting:

“If you like.... Only you must promise not to scold me about the Works.”

He gave her a look full of surprise, and touched with a curious sort of gratification; curious to her, that is, since she could not know how a well-known Labor Commissioner had taxed this man with “easiness.”

“I promise,” said he.

As they took the bottom step, he added, in a controlled sort of voice:

“Please tell me frankly—is it objectionable to you to—to have me walk with you?”

Page 104

“Oh, no,” said Cally.

Down forty feet of bricked walkway, through the swinging iron gates, out upon the public sidewalk, Carlisle walked silently beside the attacker of her father, the religious fellow whom Hugo Canning so disliked. About them in the pale dusk tall street-lights began to twinkle. Over them hung the impenetrable silence. It was but three blocks from the Woman’s Club to the House of Heth. They had traversed half of one of them before Vivian gave voice:

“I merely wanted to say this.”

And on that they walked ten steps without more speech.

“This,” resumed Mr. V.V., and his voice was not easy. “You must have thought it strange the other day, when I told you the—the work I had taken up.... My articles, I mean.... I should know, if anybody does, that you—your family—have had much trouble to bear of late.... It seems that I should be the last person to do what will bring you more trouble—annoyance certainly, pain perhaps.... I felt that I wanted you to know, at least, that it took a—a strong necessity to make me go into the matter—at this time.... I wanted to tell you that—personally—I’ve been very sorry about it....”

She hesitated a moment, and then said:

“I don’t doubt that.... I haven’t doubted it since I stopped to think.”

And if this was disloyalty to papa, Cally felt that she could not help it.... What, after all, did she know about it? Surely it was all a men’s matter, a mere question of “reform,” in which some thought one way and some another, and each side said hard things without meaning them exactly. Probably papa would be the last person to wish her to interfere....

“Thank you,” he replied, it seemed with feeling in his voice. And walking on, looking straight before him, he added:

“There was one thing more ... Ah—pardon me.”

The young doctor carried a cane, but used it principally for swinging and lunging. In view of his infirmity, Cally had begun by walking more slowly than was her custom. It had soon developed, however, that he was a rapid walker, and of absent-minded habit as well, particularly when talking. So, throughout the brief walk, her difficulty was to keep apace with him.

“What you said just now—my scolding you about the Works.... I realize that it must have seemed peculiar to you, and—and—weak—unmanly—my pursuing you so about a—a—purely business matter. Of course you must have felt that if I had criticisms to

make, I should have taken them to your father—instead of inflicting them on you, all the time."

He paused; but the girl said nothing. She had, in fact, speculated considerably on this very point: how could she possibly have any responsibility for the way papa ran his business? It occurred to her to ask the man plainly whether he considered that she had; but she did not do so, perhaps fearing that he might reply in the affirmative....

Page 105

“I once tried to explain it, in a way,” he went on, hurriedly. “I said that I didn’t know your father.... You naturally considered that merely a—a foolish sort of—claim—explaining nothing. I suppose you’ve forgotten all this, but—”

“No, I remember.”

“Then let me say that—the other day, when I saw you—I had no idea of mentioning the Works to you, other than to explain my position—not an *idea*.... And then, when we talked—well, I did,” he said with a kind of naked ingenuousness, as if no one could have been more surprised about it all than he.... “I can’t explain it, so that it won’t still seem peculiar to you.... It’s only that I do feel somehow that—that knowing people makes a great difference—in certain respects....”

“I—think I can understand that.”

“It’s generous of you to be willing to try.”

“No,” said Cally, pulling her veil down at the chin, and quickening her steps as he strode on, “I’m only trying to be—reasonable about it.”

They were passing people now and then in the twilight street, most of whom Cally spoke to; and once she thought how surprised Hugo would be, could he look over from Washington and see her walking amiably in this company. But then Hugo might have thought of these matters last year, when he said she wasn’t the girl he had asked to marry him.

“Besides,” said she, suddenly, “you don’t mean to say anything—*terribly* bad about the Works in the articles—do you?”

“Yes, terribly,” replied Mr. V.V., leaving her completely taken aback.

He added, formally, after a step or two: “I—ah—shouldn’t feel honest if I left you in the slightest doubt—on that point.”

But she could not believe now that his articles would be so terrible, no matter what he said, and her strange reply was:

“Then—suppose we don’t talk about it.”

He said: “I feel it’s better so.” And then they walked on rapidly in silence.

And somewhere in this silence, it came over Cally that the reason she could not distrust this man was because, in a very special way, she had learned to trust him; could not dislike him because the truth was that in her heart she liked him very much. And people must act as they felt. And then her thought suddenly advanced much further, as if

mounting the last step in a watch-tower: and Cally saw that the question between herself and V. Vivian had always been, not what she might think of him, but what he thought of her....

The fruitful pause ran rather long. She considered complimenting Mr. V.V. upon his speech, expressing her surprise at his unlooked-for gentleness on the subject of the poor. How could one who spoke so kindly write terrible articles in the newspapers, attacking one's own father? Cally wondered, missing the perfectly obvious point of it all, namely: that when a man is a guest at a woman's club, his particular task is to look sharp to his tongue, ruling with a strong hand what besetting weakness he may have for grim speech, and abhorring ...

Page 106

But the whole subject was difficult to the girl, and it was he who broke the silence, speaking his pedestrian's apology again. And this time, so swift and straight had they come, Cally replied, with quite a natural laugh:

"Never mind.... Here I am."

She halted before the white-stone steps of home, and glanced involuntarily toward the windows. Independent though she felt since day before yesterday, she would not have cared to have mamma glance out just then....

"I *hadn't* realized that we were here already!"

"Oh, it isn't far, as you see.... But it was good of you to bring me."

It was a parting speech; but Cally said it with no inflection of finality. So, at least, it seemed to be considered. V. Vivian stood drawing O's with his stick on the flagging belonging to Mr. Heth, of the Works. He took some pains to make them exactly round.

"I hope," said he, "that your—your annoyance over this matter won't interfere with your interest in the Settlement. I hope you still think of—of helping in the work."

"Oh!... I don't know," replied Cally, having thought but little about this since Hugo's reentrance into her life. "Mr. Pond, you see, convinced me pretty well of my uselessness—"

"It's only his manner!—he's always so mortally afraid that people aren't in earnest. I'm certain he could find—ah—suitable and congenial work, if you—you cared to give him another chance. And I'm certain you'd like him, when you knew him a little better."

"You like him?"

"I put him above any man I know, except only Mr. Dayne."

The tall electric light four doors below, which so irritated the Heths when they sat on their flowered balcony on summer nights, shone now full upon the old family enemy. It was observed that he wore, with his new blue suit, a quaint sprigged waistcoat which looked as if it also might have come down from his Uncle Armistead, along with the money he had given away. The old-fashioned vestment seemed to go well with the young man's face....

Cally stood upon the bottom step of the House, and drew her hand along the rail. It had occurred to her to tell him that she would probably go away to live; but now she only said, half-absently:

"I might think about it, and let you know later."

And then, as he accepted her tone as dismissal, and his hand started toward his hat, she spoke impulsively and hurriedly:

“Tell me, is it your feeling that this matter—the Works—makes it necessary for us to—to go on quarreling?”

The two stood looking at each other. And in each, in this moment, though in differing degree, the desire for harmoniousness was meeting the more intangible feeling that harmony between them seemed to involve surrender in another direction.

“How could it be?” said the man. “It’s what I’ve been trying to say. But I naturally supposed that you—”

Page 107

“I supposed so, too. It seems that I don’t.”

She looked down at her hand upon the rail, and said: “Don’t misunderstand me. Of course I think that papa is doing what is right. Of course I am on his side. I think your sympathy with the poor makes you extreme. But ... you asked me the other day to try to see your point of view. Well, I think I do see it now. People,” said Cally, with a young dignity that became her well, “sometimes agree to disagree. I feel—now when we’ve quarreled so much—that I’d like to be friends.”

The tall young man looked hurriedly away, down the dusky street. In his mind were his articles, shooting about: his terrible articles, where surely nobody would find any gentleness to surprise them. They were the best thing he would ever do; precisely the thing he had always wanted to do. And yet—well he knew now that he had no joy in them....

“It’s tremendously generous of you,” he said, mechanically.

Cally’s eyes wavered from his face, and she answered: “No, I’m not generous.”

Her struggle was to keep life fixed and constant, and all about her she found life fluent and changing. Or perhaps life was constant, and the fluency was in her. Or perhaps the difficulty was all in this man, about whom she had never been able to take any position that he did not shortly oust her from it. Considering her resolution only last night, she too had thought, when she began, that she was carrying generosity to the point of downright disloyalty to papa. By what strangeness of his expression did he make her feel that even this was not generous enough, that more was required of the daughter of the Works than merely withdrawing from all responsibility?...

V. Vivian regarded the lovely Hun. As a prophet you might glory, but as a man you must face the music....

“But I must tell you,” he began, with visible effort, “that you—you will feel very differently, when you’ve seen—”

However, she interrupted him, raising her eyes with a little smile, sweet and somewhat sad.

“I’ll look after my part of it,” said she; and there was her pledge of amity held out, gloved in white. “Do you think you can be my friend?”

The light showed another change in the young man’s face. He took the hand, and said with sudden strange feeling:

“Let my life prove it.”

So Cally turned away thinking that she had found that rarest thing among men, a friend of women.

And Mr. V.V. walked off blindly up the lamplit street, his heart a singing and a pain.

XXVII

Of one of the Triumphs of Cally's Life, and the Tete-a-tete following, which vaguely depresses her; of the Little Work-Girl who brought the Note that Sunday, oddly remet at Gentlemen's Furnishings.

Canning was absent more than two weeks. His attorney's business had brought entanglements before and behind;

Page 108

he was by no means a free man even now. Not all the powers of government could have detained him, we may be sure, had he considered such detention hurtful to the dearest matter in the world. But Canning, in the peculiar circumstances, had concluded that a period of meditation was well, that absence made the heart grow fonder; and, if human calculations are worth anything at all, his conclusions were amply justified. Through the days of their separation his chosen had constantly felt upon her the weight of that vast intangible pressure which pins each mortal of us, except the strong, to his own predestined groove. Chiefly mamma, but many other things, too, had been pressing Cally steadily from thoughts of useful deeds, of which she knew so little, toward thoughts of Mrs. Hugo Canning, of which she knew so much. For sixteen days, time and circumstance had played straight into her lover's hands....

Hugo paused to be welcomed, on his way from the train, Olympian of mien, and beautifully dressed, he looked indeed exactly the sort of man who would shortly have use for the contents of the little velvet box, at this moment reposing snugly in his waistcoat pocket. Still, he had turned up the collar of his big travelling-coat, and a slight hoarseness indicated that the throat trouble which had sent him south last year had returned with the first frost.

"I can draw on it for another six months' furlough," said he, meeting Cally's eyes with gay meaning, "just as soon as I have need for such a thing."

He had come this time as the open gallant, Lochinvar in all men's sight. If his lady desired ceremonies all in order, in sooth she should have them. For the first week of his absence, he had strategically allowed himself to be lost in silence. And then the postman and expressman had suddenly begun to bring reminders of him, letters, bon-bons, books even, flowers every day, and every day a different sort. Cally greeted him wearing out-of-season violets from his own florist. And by telegraph to the faithful Willie Kerr, the gifted wooer had arranged a little dinner for his first evening, to give his official courtship a background which in other days it had sometimes lacked....

"To my mind it's a bore," said he, as they parted. "Please expect to give me a little time of my own afterwards."

The occasion was no bore to Carlisle. She recognized it as one of the triumphs of her life. The material dinner could of course be no better than the New Arlington could make it; but then the New Arlington was a hotel which supercilious tourists always mentioned with pleased surprise in their letters home; that is, if they had any homes and ever thought of writing to them. And Cousin Willie Kerr, having got "off" at three-thirty with *carte blanche* for the arrangements, that night proved that the world of Epicurus had lost an artist when he had turned his talents to commerce. But of course Carlisle's triumph lay not in glowing candle-shades or masses of red and pink roses, not in

delicate viands or vintages, however costly. She read her brilliance in the eyes and bearing of Hugo Canning's guests.

Page 109

They sat down twelve at table. Beside Carlisle's own little coterie, there were present Mr. and Mrs. Allison Payne, who, before they had retired to the country to bring up their children, had been conspicuous in that little old-school set which included Mrs. Berkeley Page: simple-mannered, agreeable people these were, who were always very pleasant when you met them, but whom you never really seemed to know any better. And Mrs. Payne, who was Hugo's first cousin, had kissed Carlisle when they met in the tiring-room, and hoped very prettily that they were going to be friends. Still more open was the gratulation of the somewhat less exclusive. Papa had been detained by business, and J. Forsythe Avery, having been asked at the last moment to fill his place, had broken up another dinner-table to be seen at Canning's. Unquestionably he must have recognized a doughty rival, but Carlisle, who sat next him, easily saw how high she had shot up in his pink imagination. As for dear Mats Allen, her late funeral note had quite vanished in loving rapture, with just that undercurrent of honest envy so dear to the heart of woman.

"He's simply mad about you, Cally! The way he looked and looked at you!... And he never even listened to poor little me, chatting away beside him, and frightened out of my wits all the time, he's so lordly."

This was when dinner was over, and the guests were strolling from the little dining-room for coffee in the winter garden. Cally smiled. She had observed that most of her best friend's time had gone, not to chatting to Hugo, but to lavishing her delicious ignorance and working her telling optic system on J. Forsythe Avery, who was so evidently now to be released for general circulation....

Mats seized the moment to inquire, simply, whether she or Evey was to be maid of honor; and Cally then laughed merrily.

"Perhaps we shall have it done by a justice of the peace.... Mats, you're the greatest little romancer I ever saw. How you got it into your pretty noddle that Mr. Canning has the faintest interest in me I can't imagine...."

Willie Kerr, too, paid his tribute, having momentarily withdrawn himself from mamma, whose loyal escort he was once more. Willie was a shade balder than last year, when he had played his great part in Cally's life and then sunk below her horizon; a shade more rotund; a shade rosier in the face. But he was as genial as ever, being well lined now with a menu to his own taste and an exceptionally good champagne.

"Knew he'd come back, Carlisle," said Willie, standing before a florid oil-painting he had lured her into a parlor to look at. "Said to Eva Payne in September—no, August, one Sunday it was—'Canning'll be back soon as she gets home,' s'I. 'Don't know what happened, that trouble in the spring. Don't want to know—none of my business. But mark my words, Eva Payne,' s'I, 'Hugo Canning'll be back.' Fact," said Willie, grinning cordially. "Funny how I knew. And don't forget, Carlisle, m'dear, 'twas your Uncle

Cosmo did it all! Hey? Remember that tea in my apartments? Always keep a spare room ready for Uncle Cosmo, and, by gad, I'll come and spend my summers with you."

Page 110

And later, Eva Payne, the once far unattainable, asked Mrs. Heth and her daughter for luncheon on Friday—"with a few of our friends." Mamma received the invitation like an accolade. Truly that ten thousand dollars might well have remained in bank, subject to personal check....

The little dinner, with its air of everything being all settled, was a huge success; a bit too huge to Hugo's way of thinking. It was eleven o'clock before he really had a word with Carlisle.

"It began to look like a house-party," said he....

They were alone now in the drawing-room at home, a room whose dim beautiful lights made it look always at its best at night. Mamma had just gone up. Cally stood in front of a small plaque-mirror; she had taken off her wraps, and was now fluffing up her fine ash-gold hair where the scarf over her head had pressed it down. The pose, with upraised arms, was an alluring one; she was lithe, with a charming figure. And she still looked very young, as fresh as a rose, as new as spring and first love.

"Cally," said Canning, behind her—"I've fallen in love with your little name, you see, and I'm always going to call you by it after this—Cally, did I ever mention to you that you're the prettiest girl I ever saw. Only pretty is not the word...."

Cally laughed at her reflection in the glass.

"You could never have fallen in love with me—or my name—unless you'd thought so.... Could you?"

"I've never asked myself. But I could fall in love with everything else about you, too, because I've gone and done it."

"I wonder ... Anyhow none of the other things matter much, do they? I can't imagine your falling in love with a hideosity, no matter how worth loving she might be."

"Under the circumstances, why bother to try?"

"It's no bother, and it's intensely interesting...."

Canning advanced a step. Carlisle's gaze moved a little and encountered his in the glass. In his eyes lay his whole opinion of one half the human world....

"*Don't* look at me in that proprietary way...."

Canning laughed softly. He was fully prepared for coquetry.

"Proprietary! It's the last way, my dear, I should venture to look at *you*."

She had allowed him to linger, certainly with no blindness as to what he desired to say to her. She had stood there with no ignorance that the moment was favorable. But now something seemed to have gone amiss, and she turned suddenly, frustrating whatever loverly intention he may have had.

Carlisle sat down in a circular brocaded chair, in which gold back and gold arms were one; a sufficiently decorative background for her shining *decollete*. Hugo, standing and fingering his white tie, looked down at her with no loss of confidence in his handsome eyes.

“You’ve changed somehow,” said he. “I haven’t quite placed it yet. Still, I can feel it there.”

Page 111

“I’m older, my friend, years older than when you used to know me. And then I’m suffering from a serious bereavement, too. I’ve lost my good opinion of myself.”

“Perhaps I can be of some help in restoring it to you.”

“That is the question.... Besides ageing immensely, I’m also getting frightfully modern, you see....”

And pursuing this latter thought a little, she presently replied to him:

“Oh, no—sociology, not politics.... I’ve been thinking for some time of inspecting the Works, to see if it needed repairs. How horrid of you to laugh! Don’t you think a woman should take some interest in how the money is made that she lives on?...”

She said this smiling, in the lightest way imaginable. Small wonder if Hugo didn’t guess that she had thought twenty times in two weeks of actually doing this thing she spoke of. Still less if it never occurred to him that he here confronted again the footprint of the condemned revivalist fellow, lately become his beloved’s sworn friend....

“Have you asked your father that question yet?”

“I thought I’d better get the advice of a prominent lawyer first. Tell me what you think?”

“The point would early arise as to how you would know, on visiting the Works, whether or not it needed repairs. You’ve inspected many factories, of course?”

“That’s true!—I know nothing in the world about it. Of course not!”

She spoke with a sort of eagerness; but went on presently in another tone: “Do you know, I really don’t know anything ...? I’ve never thought of it specially before, but all at once I’m constantly being impressed with my ignorance....”

And Hugo, with all his accomplishment and skill, could not thenceforward bring the conversation back where it belonged. Only the time and the place were his to-night, it seemed....

“I,” said the girl, “belong to the useless classes. I don’t pay my way. I’m a social deadbeat. So Mr. Pond told me the other night. You must meet Mr. Pond, Hugo, the Director of the Settlement you gave all that money to last year. He can be as horrid as anybody on earth, but is really nice in a rude interesting way. He’s packed full of quarrelsome ideas. You know, he doesn’t believe in giving money to the poor under any circumstances. Harmful temporizing, he calls it ...” A rather wide sweep here gave Mr. Pond’s views on poor relief in detail ... “Are you listening, Hugo? This information is being given for your benefit. And oh, he wants me to learn millinery from *Mme*. Smythe

(Jennie T. Smith, *nee*) and help him start a class in hat-trimming, to train girls for shop assistants. Or perhaps I'll learn cooking instead...."

"He seems to have aired his views to you pretty thoroughly," said Canning, dryly.

He rose to go, a little later, rather amused by the skill with which he had been held off. He admired the piquancy of spirit with which she took advantage of the altered positions. For him tameness was the great disillusionizer; his undefined ideal was a woman who must be won anew every day. Still, he had been rubbed a little the wrong way by the new-woman catch-phrases she had picked up somewhere, by the faintly argumentative note in her conversation....

Page 112

“Plans for to-morrow!... By the way,” said Cally, glancing away to conceal a smile as she rose, “how long shall you be in town?”

“Just as long, Miss Heth, as my business here makes necessary.”

“What can I say to that?... If I say I hope you won’t be with us long, it sounds quite rude. And if I say I hope it will be very, very long ...”

But he would not follow that lead now. His instinct, her expression warned him; and he was fully resolved that when he spoke again, it would be to land this “wild sweet thing” fluttering safe in his net. However, his laugh was not quite natural.

“I may,” said he, “get a telegram calling me off, at almost any minute. Let every one be kind to the stranger within the gates. May I nominate myself for luncheon?”

He was unanimously elected. This time, at parting, he did not touch his former betrothed’s hand. His bow was accompanied by a slightly ironic smile; it seemed to say: “Since you prefer it this way, my dear ... But really—what’s the use?”

Cally, snapping out the lights, felt vaguely depressed.

* * * * *

Next day, half an hour after luncheon, Hugo said to the greatest admirer he had on earth:

“Where did Carlisle get the notion that she wanted to go in for Settlement work?”

Mrs. Heth’s reply, delivered with a beam, was masterly in its way.

“Why, my dear Hugo! Don’t you know the sorry little makeshifts women go to, waiting for love to come to them?”

Hugo’s comment intimated that he had fancied it was something of the sort. He then went out, to his future mother-in-law’s regret; she often wondered how it was that she and Hugo had so few good talks.

Her two young people, as the good lady loved to call them once more, had separated almost from the table, but soon to re-meet. Carlisle, having spent “the morning” shopping,—that is from twelve o’clock to one-fifteen,—had departed to finish her commissions. Canning had a regretted engagement with Allison Payne, downtown, to advise Mr. Payne touching some of his investments. But he was to pick Carlisle up at Morland’s establishment at four o’clock, with the car he had hired by the week; and the remainder of the afternoon would belong to him alone. He was to have the evening, too, at the House, following a large dinner-party of the elders arranged by Mrs. Heth

before she knew the date of his return. And these two occasions, the lover resolved, should suffice his need....

Cally had her hour in the shops, enjoying herself considerably. Her purchases this afternoon were partly utilitarian, it was true, concerned with Mrs. Heth's annual box to her poor Thompson kin in Prince William County. But she took more than one little flyer on her own account. Nothing more had Cally said to her father as to giving him back the fifteen hundred dollars, dividend on her stock. Consequently she bristled with money nowadays, and had been splurging largely on highly desirable little "extras." And mamma, usually quite strict in her accounts, thought of trousseaux, and only smiled at these extravagances.

Page 113

Cally moved in her destined orbit. From shop to shop, she pleasurably pursued the material. Nevertheless, she cogitated problems as she bought; chiefly with reference to Hugo, and the two or three hours' *tete-a-tete* that waited just ahead.... At just what point should the needs of discipline be regarded as satisfied? That was the question, as she had remarked last night.

At Baird & Himmel's these knotty reflections were interrupted for a space. In this spreading mart Cally chanced to fall in with an acquaintance.

Baird & Himmel's was the great popular department store of the town, just now rapidly flowing over its whole block, and building all around the usual drug-store which declined to sell. Here rich and poor rubbed elbows with something like that human equality so lauded by Mr. V.V. and others. And here Cally had pushed her way to Gentlemen's Furnishings, her purpose being to buy two shirts for James Thompson, Jr., neck size 13, and not to cost over one dollar each, as mamma had duly noted on the memorandum.

It was ten minutes to four o'clock, as a glance at her watch now showed. Cally swung a little on her circular seat, and encountered the full stare of a girl of the lower orders, seated next her. Her own glance, which had been casual, suddenly became intent: the girl's face, an unusual one in its way, touched a chord somewhere. In a second Cally remembered the little factory hand who had brought her the note from Dr. Vivian, that fateful Sunday afternoon in May ...

The little creature bobbed her head at her, with the beginnings of an eager smile, which did not change her wide fixed stare.

"Good evenin', ma'am—Miss Heth."

"Good afternoon ..."

No more talk there had been about the Works at home, other than as to papa's plan to have Mr. and Mrs. O'Neill to dinner, to talk over matters in a friendly way. But if Cally had desired a sign of how much this subject had been on her mind since her talk with Vivian she could have found it in the mingling sensations that rose in her now. For this little apparition at her elbow—so she had learned incidentally through Hen Cooney, who knew everything—was the connecting link in the whole argument. Here, on the next seat, sat that "strong necessity" which had impelled Vivian to attack Mr. Heth in the papers.

"I remember you," said Carlisle, slowly. "I understood from Miss Cooney that you had been very sick. You don't look sick—especially."

“I been away, ma’am. On a Trip,” explained the pale operative with a kind of eagerness. “Dr. Vivian he sent me off to Atlantic City, in New Jersey, and then to a hotel in the Adriondacts. I conv’lessed, ma’am, y’know?”

“I see. Now you are going back to the Works, I suppose?”

It was not a question easy to answer with delicacy, to answer and avoid all risk of hurting a lady’s feelings. How explain that the Works were expressly prohibited by doctor’s orders, though you yourself knew that you ought to go back? How tell of special lessons at a Writing Desk every night, such as prepared people to be Authors, when anybody could see by looking at you that you were only a work-girl, and you yourself felt that it was all wrong someway?...

Page 114

Kern spoke timidly, though her wide eyes did not falter.

“Well—not just to-reckly, ma’am. The plan was, till I got my strength back, that I might lay off a little and go—go to School.”

“I see.”

The tone was cool, and the girl added with a little gasp:

“And then go back to bunchin’ again,—yes, ma’am. It’s—it’s my trade....”

Many feelings moved in Cally, and it might be that the best of them were not uppermost. Perhaps the glittering material possessed her blood, even more than of habit. Perhaps it was only her instinct warning her to take her stand now with her father, where was safety and her ordered course. Or at least it was hardly a pure impulse of generosity that made her open the plump little gold bag at her side, and produce a bill with a yellow back.

“I’m very sorry you’ve been ill,” she said, in her pretty modulated voice. “As you probably feel that you got your illness in the Works, I should like you to take this. Please consider it as coming from my father—and buy yourself something—”

All the blood in the little creature’s body seemed to rush headlong to her face. She shrank away as from something more painful than a blow. But all that she said was:

“*Oh!... Ma’am!*”

It was Miss Heth’s turn to show a red flag in her cheek.

“You don’t want it?”

“I—why ma’am,—I *couldn’t* ...”

“As you like, of course.”

She dropped the spurned gift back into her bag, with studied leisureliness, and rose at once, though she had made no purchase. Standing, she made a slight inclination of her prettily-set head. And then Miss Heth was walking away through the crowded aisle with a somewhat proud bearing and a very silken swish.

And Kern Garland swung round on her seat at Gentlemen’s Furnishings, staring wide-eyed after her, her finger at her lip ...

No fairy coming-true here, indeed, of that gorgeous fever-dream in which Miss Heth with lovely courtesy informed Miss Garland that she had been a lady all the time. But

consider the Dream-Maker's difficulties with such far-flown fancies as this: difficulties the more perplexing in a world where men's opinions differ, and some do say that she in the finest skirt is not always the finest lady ...

Yet times change, and we with them. It is a beautiful thing to believe in fairies. In the valley, men have met angels. Kern sat staring at Miss Heth's retreating back: and lo, a miracle. When the lovely lady had gone perhaps ten steps down the aisle, her pace seemed to slacken all at once, and she suddenly glanced back over her shoulder. And then—oh, wonder of wonders!—Miss Heth stopped, turned around, and came swishing straight back to the seat beside Kern Garland.

"That was silly of me," said the pretty voice. "You were quite right not to take it if you didn't want it ..."

Page 115

Kern desired to cry. But that would be very ridiculous, in a store, and doubtless annoying to Others. So the little girl began to wink hard, while staring fixedly at a given point. You could often pass it off that way, and nobody a whit the wiser.

“I’ve happened to have the Works on my mind a little of late,” added Carlisle, almost as if in apology. “But I—I’m really glad to see you again.”

She perceived the signs of agitation in the little work-girl, and attributing it all to the twenty-dollar bill, saw that she must pave the way to a conversation. And conversation, now that the ice was broken, she eagerly desired, fascinated by the thought that this girl knew at first-hand everything about the Works.

“Let me see—your name is Corinne, isn’t it?”

Kern’s eyes, wider than ever, shot back to the lady’s face. A new wonder here!—Miss Heth said it just like in the Dream: *Co-rinne*.

“Yes, ma’am,” said Co-rinne, with a little gulp and a sniff.

“And what are you doing at the Men’s Furnishing counter, Corinne?” said Carlisle, pleasantly but quite at random. “Buying a present for Mr. V.V., I suppose?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Having taken Carlisle completely aback, she hesitated and then added timidly:

“Only a fulldress-shirt protector—for his birthday, y’ know?... All his sick give him little presents now’n then, ma’am, find out his sizes and all. You know how he is, spending all his money on them, and never thinking about himself, and giving away the clo’es off his back.”

“Yes, I know.... Find out his sizes?”

“Yes, ma’am. Like, say, ’Why, Mr.—why, Dr. Vivian, what small feet you got, sir, for a gempman!’ And he’ll say, like, ’I don’t call six and a half C so small!’ Yes, ma’am—just as innocent.”

A block and a half away, Hugo Canning’s car whirled to a standstill, and Hugo sat gazing at the select door of Morland’s. In Baird & Himmel’s vast commonwealth, Kern Garland sat beside Miss Carlisle Heth at Gentlemen’s Furnishings, and could not look at the lady’s lovely clothes since her eyes could not bear to leave the yet lovelier face. Kern had not confided the secret of the protector without a turning of her heart, but now at least the thrill in her rose above that.... She and Mr. V.V.’s beautiful lady, side by side.... It was nearly as good as the velvet settee in the Dream—only for the founting, and the boy with the pink lamp on his head, and Mr. V.V....

An extremely full-busted Saleslady, with snapping black eyes, deposited a lean bundle and a ten-cent piece before the work-girl, oddly murmured something that sounded like ‘Look who’s ear,’ and then said proudly to Carlisle:

“What did you wish ’m?”

“Nothing just now, thank you.”

The Saleslady gave her a glance of intense disapproval, pushed down her generous waist-line, arrogantly patted a coal-black transformation, and wheeled with open indignation.

Page 116

“That’s nice,” said Carlisle, to the factory-girl. “Then the presents come as a surprise to him.”

“Surprise—no, ma’am. He don’t never know. Take the tags off ’n ’em, and slip ’em in his drawer, and he’ll put ’em on and never notice nor suspicion, shirts and such. It’s like he thought raiment was brought him by the crows,—like in the Bible, ma’am, y’ know?”

There was a brief silence. Carlisle’s sheltered life had not too often touched the simple annals of the poor. She seemed to get a picture....

The little work-girl’s face was not coarse, strangely enough, or even common-looking; it was pleasing in an odd, elfin way. Her white dress and black jacket were in good taste for her station, without vulgarity. Such details Carlisle’s feminine eye soon gathered in. The touch she missed was that that cheap dress was an exact copy of one she herself had worn one Sunday afternoon in May, as near as Kern Garland could remember it.

“How long were you at the Works?” said the lady suddenly.

“At the Works? More’n three years, ma’am.”

There was another silence amid the bustle of the people’s emporium.

“Tell me,” said Carlisle, with some effort, “do you—did you—looking at it from a worker’s point of view—find it such a very bad place to work?”

“Oh, *no*, ma’am!” said Kern. “Bad—oh, no! It’s—it’s fine!”

Carlisle’s gaze became wider than the little girl’s own. “But—Mr. V.V. says it’s a terrible place....”

“It’s only the beautiful way he talks,” said Kern, eagerly. “I mean, he’s so, so sorry for the poor.... But lor, ma’am, we know how rich is rich, and poor poor, and so it must always be this side o’ the pearly gates—”

She stopped short; and then added shyly, with a kind of anxiousness in her wide dark gaze: “An expression, ma’am—for Heaven. I—I just learned it.”

The lady’s look was absent. “Oh!... Where did you learn that?”

“Off Sadie Whirtle, ma’am—a friend of mine.” The girl hesitated, and then said: “That’s her now.”

And she pointed a small finger at the enormous snapping Saleslady, who stood glowering and patting her transformation at another customer ten feet away.

But Carlisle did not follow the finger, and so missed the sight of Miss Whirtle. Her rising relief had been penetrated by a doubt, not a new one ... Would her friend Vivian have committed himself to the articles for only a foolish sentimentalism which the poor themselves repudiated?...

“But tell me frankly, Corinne, for I want to know,” said she—“I know working must be hard in any case—but do the girls at the Works consider it a—a reasonably nice place?”

Kern knew nothing of the articles, of any situation: and at that *Co-rinne*, her heart ran to water within her. She would have said anything for that.

“Oh, ma’am, all say it’s the nicest place to work in town. Yes, ma’am ... And some of ’em has rich fathers and needn’t work at all anywhere, but they just go on and work at the Works, yes, ma’am, because they druther ...”

Page 117

That, by a little, drew the long-bow too hard. Cally saw that the small three-years' buncher, through politeness or otherwise, was speaking without reference to the truth. And hard upon that she had another thought, striking down the impulse to cross-examine further. What an undignified, what a cowardly way, to try to find things out! What a baby she was, to be sure!... V. Vivian knew about the Works, though it was certainly no affair of his. This frail girl, who did look rather sick now that you stopped and looked at her, knew all about it. Only she, her father's daughter, knew nothing, wrapped in her layers of pretty pink wool ...

The lady came abruptly to her feet.

"I'm glad to hear it," said she ... "But I 'm afraid I must go on now. Some one is waiting for me outside."

"Oh!—yes, ma'am!"

Kern had risen with her, though she had not learned that from the Netiquette. Much it would have amazed her to know that the heavenly visitor was regarding her with a flickering conviction of inferiority....

"Good-bye, then. I hope you'll soon get your strength back again.... And I'm very glad I saw you."

And then there was her hand held out; not lady to lady, of course, but still her lady's hand. Poor Kern, with her exaltation and her pangs, felt ready to go down on one knee to take it.

"Oh, ma'am!" she stammered. "I'm the glad one ..."

Miss Heth smiled—oh, so sweet, almost like in the Dream—and then it was all over, and she was walking away, with the loveliest rustle ever was. And Kern stood lost in the thronging aisle, staring at the point where she had disappeared and giving little pinches to her thin arm—just to make certain-sure, y' know ...

This till the voice of Miss Whirtle spoke in her ear:

"Say, Kurrin, I like that! Whyn't you ask me to shake hands with your swell dame friend?"

And Miss Heth, out in the crowded street, was heading toward Morland's with an adventurous resolution in her mind.

It had needed but a touch to make up her mind here, whether she realized it or not; and this touch the girl Corinne had given her. Now, too, impulse met convenient opportunity. For two weeks she had been thinking that if she *did* ever happen to go to

the Works, she would make a point of going in some offhand, incidental sort of way, thus proving to herself and the public that she had not the slightest responsibility for whatever might be going on there. (How could she possibly have, no matter what Mr. V.V. thought, with his exaggerated sympathies for the poor?) Now here was Hugo waiting, perfectly fitted, to her need. What could be more natural and incidental than this? She would simply be showing her father's factory to her friend, Mr. Canning....

And perhaps Cally had an even deeper feeling of Mr. Canning's admirable suitability in this connection. Somewhere just above the line of consciousness, did there not lie the subtle thought that, if what she saw at the Works *should* have power to work dangerously on her own sympathies, Hugo, with his strong worldly sense, his material perfection, his whole splendid embodiment of the victorious-class ideal, would be just the corrective she needed to keep her safe and sane?...

Page 118

* * * * *

When she was seated in the car beside him, and he was tucking the robe around her, Cally inquired with a deceptive air of indifference:

“You don’t care particularly where we go, do you, Hugo?”

“The point seems of no importance whatever, now that I’ve got you.”

“Then,” said she, smiling, “I shall take you first to the Heth Cheroot Works.”

Canning’s face, which had been buoyant from the moment his eyes discovered her in the crowd, betrayed surprise and strong disapproval. That, surely, would give his afternoon a slant different from his plannings....

“I bar the Works. I feel all ways but sociological to-day. Let’s go to the country.”

“Afterwards,” said she, with the same lightness, clear proof of the casual nature of the proposed excursion. “We’ll simply pop in for a minute or two, to see what it looks like—”

“But you can’t tell what it looks like, even—”

“Well, at least I’ll have seen it. Do give me my way about this. *You’ll* enjoy it ...”

And leaning forward on that, she said to his hired driver: “Take us to Seventeenth and Canal Streets.”

The shadow of disapprobation did not lift from Hugo’s face.

“I had no idea,” he said, boredly and somewhat stiffly, “that you took your new-thought so seriously.”

Cally laughed brightly. “But then you never think women are serious, Hugo.”

It was on the tip of her tongue to add: “Until it’s too late.” But she held that back, as being too pointedly reminiscent.

XXVIII

A Little Visit to the Birthplace of the Family; how Cally thinks Socialism and almost faints, and Hugo’s Afternoon of Romance ends Short in the Middle.

The car came to a standstill, and Cally was reminded of another afternoon, long ago, when she and Hen Cooney had encountered Mr. V.V. upon this humming corner. This time, she knew which way to look.

“There it is.... Confess, Hugo, you’re surprised that it’s so *small*!”

But Hugo helped no new-thoughter to belittle honest business.

“Unlike some I could mention, I’ve seen factories before,” quoth he. “I’ve seen a million dollar business done in a smaller plant than that.”

Actually Cally found the Works bigger than she had expected; reaction from the childish marble palace idea had swung her mind’s eye too far. But gazing at the weather-worn old pile, spilling dirtily over the broken sidewalk, she was once more struck and depressed by something almost sinister about it, something vaguely foreboding. To her imagination it was a little as if the ramshackle old pile leered at her: “Wash your hands of me if you will, young lady. I mean you harm some day....”

But then, of course, she wasn’t washing her hands of it; her hands had never been in it at all.

Page 119

“You’ll get intensely interested and want to stay hours!” said she, with the loud roar of traffic in her ears. “Remember I only came for a peep—just to see what a Works is like inside.”

Hugo, guiding her over the littered sidewalk to the shabby little door marked “Office,” swore that she could not make her peep too brief for him.

She had considered the possibility of encountering her father here; had seen the difficulties of attributing this foray to Hugo’s insatiable interest in commerce, with Hugo standing right there. However, in the very unpretentious offices inside—desolate places of common wood partitions, bare floors, and strange, tall stools and desks—she was assured by an anaemic youth with a red Adam’s apple that her father had left for the bank an hour earlier, which was according to his usual habit. She inquired for Chas Cooney, who kept books from one of those lofty stools, but Chas was reported sick in bed, as Cally then remembered that Hen had told her, some days since. Accordingly the visitors fell into the hands of Mr. MacQueen, whom Carlisle, in the years, had seen occasionally entering or leaving papa’s study o’ nights.

MacQueen was black, bullet-headed, and dour. He had held socialistic views in his fiery youth, but had changed his mind like the rest of us when he found himself rising in the world. In these days he received a percentage on the Works profits, and cursed the impudence of Labor. As to visitors, his politics were that all such had better be at their several homes, and he indicated these opinions, with no particular subtlety, to Miss Heth and Mr. Canning. He even cited them a special reason against visiting to-day: new machines being installed, and the shop upset in consequence. However, he did not feel free to refuse the request out-right, and when Canning grew a little sharp,—for he did the talking, generously enough,—the sour vizier yielded, though with no affectation of a good grace.

“Well, as ye like then.... This way.”

And he opened a door with a briskness which indicated that Carlisle’s expressed wish “just to look around” should be carried out in the most literal manner.

The opening of this door brought a surprise. Things were so unceremonious in the business district, it seemed, that you stepped from the superintendent’s office right into the middle of everything, so to speak. You were inspecting your father’s business a minute before you knew it....

Cally, of course, had had not the faintest idea what to expect at the Works. She had prepared herself to view horrors with calm and detachment, if such proved to be the iron law of business. But, gazing confusedly at the dim, novel spectacle that so suddenly confronted her, she saw nothing of the kind. Her heart, which had been beating a little faster than usual, rose at once.

Page 120

Technically speaking, which was the way Mr. MacQueen spoke, this was the receiving- and stemming-room. It was as big as a barn, the full size of the building, except for the end cut off to make the offices. Negroes worked here; negro men, mostly wearing red undershirts. They sat in long rows, with quick fingers stripping the stems from the not unfragrant leaves. These were stemmers, it was learned. Piles of the brown tobacco stood beside each stemmer, bales of it were stacked, ceiling-high, at the farther end of the room, awaiting their attentions. The negroes eyed the visitors respectfully. They were heard to laugh and joke over their labors. If they knew of anything homicidal in their lot, certainly they bore it with a fine humorous courage.

Down the aisle between the black rows, Cally picked her way after Hugo and Mr. MacQueen. Considering that all this was her father's, she felt abashingly out of place, most intrusive; when she caught a dusky face turned upon her she hastily looked another way. Still, she felt within her an increasing sense of cheerfulness. Washington Street sensibilities were offended, naturally. The busy colored stemmers were scarcely inviting to the eye; the odor of the tobacco soon grew a little overpowering; there were dirt and dust and an excess of steam-heat—"Tobacco likes to be warm," said MacQueen. And yet the dainty visitor's chief impression, somehow, was of system and usefulness and order, of efficient and on the whole well-managed enterprise.

"If there's anything the matter here," thought she, "men will have to quarrel and decide about it ... Just as I said."

The inspecting party went upward, and these heartening impressions were strengthened. On the second floor was another stemming-room, long and hot like the other; only here the stemming was done by machines—"for the fancy goods"—and the machines were operated by negro women. They were middle-aged women, many of them, industrious and quite placid-looking. Perhaps a quarter of the whole length of the room was prosaically filled with piled tobacco stored ready for the two floors of stemmers. The inspection here was brief, and to tell the truth, rather tame, like an anti-climax. Not a trace or a vestige of homicide was descried, not a blood-spot high or low....

Cally had been observing Hugo, who looked so resplendent against this workaday background, and felt herself at a disadvantage with him. He had not wanted to come at all, but now that they were here, he exhibited a far more intelligent interest in what he saw than she did or could. Oddly enough, he appeared to know a good deal about the making of cigars, and his pointed comments gradually elicited a new tone from MacQueen, who was by now talking to him almost as to an equal. Several times Cally detected his eyes upon her, not bored but openly quizzical.

"Learning exactly how a cheroot factory ought to be run?" he asked, *sotto voce*, as they left the second floor.

Page 121

“Oh, exactly!... For one thing, I’d recommend a ventilator or two, shouldn’t you?”

She felt just a little foolish. She also felt out of her element, incidental, irresponsible, and genuinely relieved. Still, through this jumble of feelings she had not forgotten that they were yet to see that part of the Works which she had specially come to peep at....

Progress upward was by means of a most primitive elevator, nothing but an open platform of bare boards, which Mr. MacQueen worked with one hand, and which interestingly pushed up the floor above as one ascended. As they rose by this quaint device, Carlisle said:

“Is this next the bunching-room, Mr. MacQueen?”

“It is, Miss.”

“Bunching-room!” echoed Hugo, with satiric admiration. “You *are* an expert....”

The lift-shaft ran in one corner of the long building. Debarking on the third floor, the visitors had to step around a tall, shining machine, not to mention two workmen who had evidently just landed it. Several other machines stood loosely grouped here, all obviously new and not yet in place.

Hugo, pointing with his stick, observed: “Clearing in new floor-space, I see.”

MacQueen nodded. “Knocked out a cloak-room. Our fight here’s for space. Profits get smaller all the time....”

“H’m.... You figured the strain, I suppose. Your floor looks weak.”

“Oh, it’ll stand it,” said the man, shortly. “This way.”

Carlisle wondered if the weak floor was what her friend Vivian had meant when he said, in his extreme way, that the Works might fall down some day. She recalled that she had thought the building looked rather ricketty, that day last year. But these thoughts hardly entered her mind before the sight of her eyes knocked them out. The visitors squeezed around the new machines, and, doing so, stepped full into the bunching-room. And the girl saw in one glance that this was the strangest, the most interesting room she had ever seen in her life.

Her first confused sense was only of an astonishing mass of dirty white womanhood. The thick hot room seemed swarming with women, alive and teeming with women, women tumbling all over each other wherever the eye turned. Tall clacking machines ran closely around the walls of the room, down the middle stood a double row of tables; and at each machine, and at every possible place at the tables, sat a woman crowded upon a woman, and another and another.

Dirt, noise, heat, and smell: women, women, women. Conglomeration of human and inhuman such as the eyes of the refined seldom look upon.... Was this, indeed, the pleasantest place to work in town?...

“Bunchin’ and wrappin’,” said MacQueen. “Filler’s fed in from that basin on top. She slips in the binder—machine rolls ’em together.... Ye can see here.”

They halted by one of the bunching-machines, and saw the parts dexterously brought together into the crude semblance of the product, saw the embryo cigars thrust into wooden forms which would shape them yet further for their uses in a world asmoke....

Page 122

“Jove! Watch how her hands fly!” said Hugo, with manlike interest for processes, things done. “Look, Carlisle.”

Carlisle looked dutifully. It was in the order of things that she should bring Hugo to the Works, and that, being here, he should take charge of her. But, unconsciously, she soon turned her back to the busy machine, impelled by the mounting interest she felt to see bunching, not in detail, but in the large.

Downstairs the workers had been negroes; here they were white women, a different matter. But Cally had a closer association than that, in the girl she had just been talking to, Corinne, who had worked three years in this room. It wasn’t so easy to preserve the valuable detached point of view, when you actually knew one of the people....

“Three cents a hundred,” said MacQueen’s rugged voice.

There was a fine brown dust in the air of the teeming room, and the sickening smell of new tobacco. Not a window in the place was open, and the strong steam heat seemed almost overwhelming. The women had now been at it for near nine hours. Damp, streaked faces, for the most part pale and somewhat heavy, turned incessantly toward the large wall-clock at one end of the room. Eyes looked sidewise upon the elegant visitors, but then the flying fingers were off again, for time is strictly money with piecework ... How could they stand being so *crowded*, and couldn’t they have any *air*?

“Oh, five thousand a day—plenty of them.”

“Five thousand!—how do they do it?”

“We had a girl do sixty-five hundred. She’s quit ... Here’s one down here ain’t bad.”

The trio moved down the line of machines, past soiled, busy backs. Close on their left was the double row of tables, where the hurrying “wrappers” sat like sardines. Cally now saw that these were not women at all, but young girls, like Corinne; girls mostly younger than she herself, some very much younger. Only they seemed to be girls with a difference, girls who had somehow lost their girlhood. The rather nauseating atmosphere which enveloped them, the way they were huddled together yet never ceased to drive on their tasks, the slatternly uncorseted figures, stolid faces and furtive glances; by something indefinable in their situation, these girls seemed to have been degraded and dehumanized, to have lost something more precious than virtue.

Yet some of them were quite pretty, beneath dust and fatigue; one, with a quantity of crinkly auburn hair, was very pretty, indeed. The girl Corinne, after three years here, was both pretty and possessed of a certain delicacy; a delicacy which forbade her to tell Mr. Heth’s daughter what she really thought about the Works. For that must have been it....

“This ‘un can keep three wrappers pretty busy when she’s feelin’ good. Can’t yer, Miller?... Ye’ll see the wrappers there, in a minute.”

This ’un, or Miller, was a tall, gaunt, sallow girl, who handled her machine with the touch of a master, eliminating every superfluous move and filling a form of a dozen rough cheroots quickly enough to take a visitor’s breath away. No doubt it was very instructive to see how fast cheroots could be made. However, the stirring interest of the daughter of the Works was not for mechanical skill.

Page 123

Cally stood with a daintily scented handkerchief at her nostrils, painfully drinking in the origins of the Heth fortune. The safeguarding sense of irresponsibility ebbed, do what she might. Well she knew that this place could not be so bad as it seemed to her; for then her father would not have let it be so. For her to seem to disapprove of papa's business methods was mere silly impertinence, on top of the disloyalty of it. But none of the sane precepts she had had two weeks to think out seemed to make any answer to the disturbing sensations she felt rising, like a sickness, within her....

Her sense was of something polluting at the spring of her life. Here was the soil that she was rooted in, and the soil was not clean. It might be business, it might be right; but no argument could make it agreeable to feel that the money she wore upon her back at this moment was made in this malodorous place, by these thickly crowded girls.... Was it in such thoughts that grew this sense of some personal relation of herself with her father's most unpleasant bunching-room? Was it for such reasons that V. Vivian had asked her that day at the Settlement why didn't she go to the Works some day?...

She heard Hugo's voice, with a note of admiration for visible efficiency: "How do they keep it up at this clip nine hours?"

"Got to do it, or others will."

"You expect each machine to produce so much, I suppose?"

And Cally, so close to her lordly lover that her arm brushed his, was seeing for the first time in her life what people meant when they threw bricks at papa on election night, or felt the strong necessity of attacking him in the papers. By processes that were less mental than emotional, even physical, she was driven further down a well-trod path and stood dimly confronting the outlines of a vast interrogation.... What particular human worth had she, Cally Heth, that the womanhood of these lower-class sisters should be sapped that she might wear silk next her skin, and be bred to appeal to the highly cultivated tastes of a Canning?...

If there are experiences which permanently extend the frontiers of thought, it was not in this girl's power to recognize one of them closing down on her now. But she did perceive, by the growing commotion within, that she had made a great mistake to come to this place....

"Now, here's wrapping," said MacQueen. "Hand work, you see."

But his employer's daughter, it appeared, had seen enough of cigar-making for one day. At that moment she touched Canning's well-tailored arm.

"Let's go.... It's—stifling here."

Hugo, just turning from the bunching-machine, regarded her faintly horrified face with some amusement. And Carlisle saw that he was amused.

“I was wondering,” said he, “how long your sociology would survive this air....”

The peep was meant to end there, and should have done so. But unluckily, at just that juncture, there came a small diversion. The gaunt girl Miller, by whose machine the little party stood, took it into her head to keep at it no longer.

Page 124

Though nobody had noticed it, this girl had been in trouble for the last five minutes. The presence of the visitors, or of the superintendent, had evidently made her nervous; she kept looking half-around out of the darting corners of her eyes. Three times, as the men watched and talked about her, she had raised a hand in the heat and brushed it hurriedly before her eyes. And then, just as the superintendent turned from her and all would have been well again, her overdrawn nerve gave out. The hands became suddenly limp on the machine they knew so well; they slid backward, at first slowly and then with the speed of a falling body; and poor Miller slipped quietly from her stool to the floor, her head actually brushing the lady's skirt as she fell.

Cally stifled a little cry. Hugo, obvious for once, said, "Why, she's fainted!"—in an incredulous voice. Considerably better in action were the experienced Works people. MacQueen sprang for a water-bucket with a celerity which strongly suggested practice. A stout, unstayed buncher filled a long-felt want by flinging open a window. One from a neighboring machine sat on the floor, Miller's head on her lap. Two others stood by....

Carlisle, holding to the silenced machine with a small gloved hand, gazed down as at a bit of stage-play.

They had formed a screen about the fallen girl, under MacQueen's directions, to cut her off from the general view. The superintendent's gaze swept critically about. However, the sudden confusion had drawn the attention of all that part of the room, and concealment proved a too optimistic hope. The moment happened to be ripe for one of those curious panics of the imagination to which crowded womanhood is psychologically subject. Knowledge that somebody was down ran round the room as if it had been shouted; and on the knowledge, fear stalked among the tired girls, and the thing itself was born of the dread of it.

So it was that Carlisle, gripping fast to poor Miller's machine, heard an odd noise behind her, and turned with a sickening dropping of the heart. Five yards away a girl gave a little moan and flopped forward upon her machine. She was a fine, strapping young creature, and it is certain that two minutes before nothing had been further from her mind than fainting. It did not stop there. Far up the room a "wrapper" rose in the dense air, took her head in both hands and fell backward into the arms of the operative next her. In the extreme corner of the great room a little stir indicated that another had gone down there. Work had almost ceased. Many eyes stared with sudden nervous apprehension into other eyes, as if to say: "*Am I to be the next?*..."

MacQueen's voice rang out—a fine voice it was, the kind that makes people sit down again in a fire-scared theatre:

"*Take your seats, every one of you*.... Nothing's going to happen. You're all right, I say. Go on with your work. *Sit down. Get to work*...."

Page 125

“Air,” said Cally Heth, in a small colorless voice.

Hugo wheeled sharply.

“Great heavens!—*Carlisle*!... Do you feel faint?”

He had her at the open window in a trice, clasping her arm tight, speaking masculine encouragement.... “Hold hard, my dear!... I should have watched you.... Now, breathe this.... Gulp it in, Cally....”

His beloved, indeed, like the work-sisters, had felt the brush of the black wing. For an instant nothing had seemed surer than that the daughter of the Works would be the fifth girl to faint in the bunching-room that day; she had seen the floor rise under her whirling vision....

But once at the window the dark minute passed speedily. The keen October air bore the gift of life. Blood trickled back into the dead white cheeks.

“I ... was just a little dizzy,” said Cally, quite apologetically....

And, though the visitors departed then, almost immediately, all signs of the sudden little panic in the bunching-room were already rapidly disappearing. Work proceeded. The gaunt girl Miller, who had earned MacQueen’s permanent dislike by starting all the trouble, was observed sitting again at her machine, hands and feet reaching out for the accustomed levers.

* * * * *

It made an amazing difference simply to be outdoors again. The last few minutes in the Works had been like a waxing nightmare. But the sunshine was bright and sane; the raw clean winds blew the horrors away. Carlisle, realizing that she had been swept along toward something like hysterics, struggled with some success to recapture poise and common sense.

But she could not now quite strike the manner of one who has merely paused for an irresponsible peep. Hugo was aware of a change in her, before they were fairly in the car again. He had occasion to reflect anew, not without irritation, what an unfortunate turn she had given to the afternoon of romance, over his own plainly expressed wishes....

Yet nothing could have exceeded his solicitousness. He seemed to feel that he had been neglectful upstairs, that she would not have felt faint if he had properly presided over her movements. Cally had to assure him half a dozen times in as many blocks that she felt quite herself again.

And, meantime, he conscientiously gave himself to relieving her mind of the effects of her own feminine foolishness. That queer and undoubtedly upsetting bit of “crowd psychology” they had seen—that, he pointed out, had come merely from the unusual heat, the control of the steam-pipes happening to be out of whack to-day. Such a thing didn’t happen once in six months; so that surly fellow MacQueen had said. Of course, producing wealth was a hard business at best, let none deny it. Everybody would like to see factories run on the model theory, like health resorts, but the truth was that those ideas were mostly wind and water, and had never worked out yet. An owner must think of his profits first, unfeeling as that might seem; else he would have to shut up shop, and then where would those girls be for a living? They needn’t work for her father unless they wanted to, of course....

Page 126

“You should look into a cannery some day, for sights—by which I mean that you shouldn’t do anything of the sort!... Oh, get us to some quieter street there, Frederick!... But it was my fault for agreeing to go with you. I knew, as you couldn’t, that a going factory’s no place for a girl delicately brought up. Those women don’t mind. That is, as a rule ...”

Carlisle responded to this sensible treatment with what lightsomeness she could muster; but the odd truth was that she hardly listened to Hugo. Heaven knew that she needed the strong sane arguments, heaven knew that he could state them all unanswerably. And yet, just as she was aware that her woman’s feelings about the bunching-room would have no weight with Hugo, so she was curiously aware that Hugo’s arguments produced no effect at all upon her. If she had relied upon him as a demolishing club against Vivian, the over-sympathetic, it appeared that his strength was not equal to the peculiar demand. And all at once she seemed to have gotten to know her lover very well; there were no more surprises in him. She suddenly perceived a strange and hitherto unsuspected likeness between Hugo and mamma, in that you could not talk over things with either of them....

“Remember, Cally,” he said, summing up, “this is the first factory you’ve ever seen in your life. You’ve nothing at all to judge by, in a business matter of this sort—”

Something in his tone flicked her briefly out of her resolve not to argue; but she spoke lightly enough.

“Yes, I judge by the way it made me feel. I judge everything that way.”

“That’s natural, of course,” said he, with a slight smile, “but after all it’s rather a woman’s way of judging things than a sociologist’s. Isn’t it?”

“But I am a woman.”

The car shook off the dust of the business district, mounted a long hill, bowled into streets fairer than Canal. Hugo’s sense of a grievance deepened. Granted that she had nearly fainted, as a consequence of her own foolish perversity, it was surely now due to him that she should begin to be her sweet natural self again.

He had had quite enough of this irrational invasion of his afternoon; and so, having said just a word or two in reply to her last remark, he banished the matter from the conversation.

“Now,” said he, “to fresh woods and pastures new, and a song of the open road!... Which way shall we go?”

Cally hesitated.

“I’m sorry, Hugo—but I think I should like to go home, if you don’t mind.”

“*Home?*”

“I really don’t feel quite like a drive now. I’m very sorry—”

Canning gazed down at her in dismay.

“I knew you didn’t feel quite yourself yet. You couldn’t deceive *me* ... But don’t let’s go *home!* Why, this air is the very thing you need, Carlisle. It will set you up in no time.”

But no, she seemed to think that was not what she needed, nor were her doubts removed by several further arguments from him.

Page 127

Canning sat back in the care with an Early Christian expression. She had said, not five minutes ago, that she felt perfectly well; perfectly well she looked. Was it imaginable that she really took seriously the absurd little smatterings of new-womanism she had picked up, God knew where, while waiting for love to come?...

“Carlisle,” he began, patiently, “I understand your feelings perfectly, of course, and natural enough they are to a girl brought up as you’ve been. At the same time, I’m not willing to leave you feeling disgusted with your father’s methods of—”

“Disgusted with papa!” exclaimed Cally, quite indignantly. But she added, in a much more tempered tone: “Why, Hugo—how could you think such a thing?... I assure you I’m disgusted with nobody on earth but myself.”

At that the annoyed young man gave a light laugh.

“I’m evidently about fifty years before the war, as you say down here. I can’t understand, to save me, how—”

“I know it, Hugo. You never understand how I feel about things, and always assume that I’ll feel the way you want me to.”

Carlisle spoke quietly, almost gently. Yet Canning’s feeling was like that of a man who, in the dark, steps down from a piazza at a point where steps are not. The jolt drove some of the blood from his cheek. But his only reply was to poke his hired driver in the back with his stick and say, distantly: “Nine hundred and three Washington.”

The hired car rolled swiftly, in sun and wind, toward the House of Heth. Cobblestones were left behind; the large wheels skimmed the fair asphaltum. Three city blocks they went with no music of human speech....

“But I didn’t mean to seem rude,” said Cally, in a perfectly natural manner, “and I *am* really very sorry to—to change the afternoon’s plans. I don’t feel quite well, and I think perhaps I ought to rest—just till dinner-time. You remember you are dining with us to-night.”

The apology, the pacific, non-controversial tone, unbent the young man instantly. Small business for the thinking sex to harbor a grudge against an irrational woman’s moment of pique. Moreover, whatever this woman’s foibles, Hugo Canning chanced to find himself deep in love with her. He met her advance with only a slight trace of stiffness. By the time they arrived at the Heth house, mamma’s two young people were chatting along almost as if nothing had happened....

However, back at home, Cally seemed unresponsive to Hugo’s overture in the direction of his lingering awhile in the drawing-room. It became evident that the afternoon was

ruined beyond repair. He paused but a moment, to see whether any telegrams or telephone calls had been sent up for him from the hotel.

It proved that there was nothing of the sort. The lover looked relieved. He wished his lady a refreshing rest, apropos of the evening. Beneath his feeling that he was an ill-used man, there had risen in Canning the practical thought that he had let this wild sweet thing get too sure of him....

Page 128

“I shall see you then,” said he, at the door, “at seven-thirty.”

“Yes, indeed.... I’ll be quite myself again then. Au revoir!”

She stood alone, in the dim and silent hall. The house was sweet with Hugo’s flowers. Cally, standing, picked a red rose slowly to pieces. She could pursue her own thoughts now, and her struggle was against thinking ill of her father. If it was the extreme of sympathy with the poor to regard the Works as a homicidal place, then her present impulse was plainly toward such extremity. But she dared not allow that impulse its head, fearful of the far-reaching consequences that would thereby be entailed. Yet, even from the cheeriest view, it was clear that the Works were a pretty bad place—-Hugo himself had tacitly admitted that by the arguments he employed,—and if that was so, what was to be said for papa? Possibly she and mamma did have some connection with the business, but it would be simply foolish to say that they were *responsible* for the overcrowding in the bunching-room. How could she be—how *could* she?—she, to whom her father had never spoken seriously in his life, who had never even seen the Works inside till to-day? No, it was papa’s business. He was responsible; and it was a responsibility indeed....

It was quarter-past five. So, presently, the tall hall-clock said, on its honor as a reliable timepiece.... Only an hour since she and Hugo had met in front of Morland’s....

Still the girl did not hurry up to her rest-chamber. She wandered pointlessly from empty hall to silent drawing room. There had descended upon her that sense of loneliness in the great world, to which in the spring and summer she had been no stranger. She felt listless and oddly tired. Presently, when she had thought about it a little, she was certain that she felt quite unwell; almost ill. The strong probability was that she had a bad sick headache coming on; small wonder, either, after nearly fainting with poor Miller and others at the Works....

Cally considered whether she did not owe it to her health to dine from a tray this evening, giving Hugo to-morrow morning instead. Even as she revolved this thought—-with especial reference to explaining it to mamma—there came her humble admirer, Flora Johnson, col’d, saying that Mr. Canning begged to speak to her a minute at the telephone.

“Mr. *Canning*?”

Flora said yas’m, and flashed her dazzling teeth. Her mistress ascended the stairs in surprise, wondering what reason Hugo would assign for wanting to come back.

However, Hugo’s intentions were the contrary. His unhappy request was to be excused from dinner this evening.

The young man's voice over the wire was at once regretful, annoyed, and (somewhat) apologetic. There was, it seemed, the devil to pay over certain entanglements of the rate-case matter. He had found Mr. Deming, of his law firm, waiting for him at the hotel. Mr. Deming had come for a conference which could not be postponed; he had to get back to Washington by the nine-thirty train. Would Carlisle make his excuses to Mrs. Heth, and know for herself how disappointed he was?

Page 129

He spoke in loverly vein, and Cally was able to answer soothingly. She mentioned that she would probably withdraw from the dinner, too; so that even mamma's table would not be upset at all. He would be much missed, of course. The suggestion emerged, or perhaps it was merely in the air, that Hugo was to come in, if he could, in the later evening.

Cally was at the telephone some three minutes. Turning away, she did not go at once to rest, though now halfway to her room. If she was not going to dinner, there was more time, of course. Or possibly her head had taken a slight turn for the better. The girl leaned against the banisters in the quiet upper hall, full of depression. And then she said aloud, with a resolution that was perhaps not so sudden as it seemed:

"I'll go and see Hen Cooney!"

XXIX

One Hour, in which she apologizes twice for her Self, her Life and Works; and once she is beautifully forgiven, and once she never will be, this Side of the Last Trump.

The Cooneys' door was opened, after the delay usual with the poor, by Henrietta herself, this moment returned from the bookstore. Hen wore her hat, but not her coat, and it was to be observed that one hand held a hot-water bottle, imperfectly concealed behind her back.

"Hurrah!—Cally!" cried she. "We were talking of you at dinner to-day, wondering what had become of you. Come into the house, and don't mind a bit if this bottle leaks all over you. Such troubles!"

"How is Chas to-day? I just heard that he hadn't been at work for a week."

"Chas?... Chas is better—Cousin Martha's worse—father's just the same—Looloo's dancing the floor with a toothache." Hen recited this in the manner of a chant, and added, as she ushered her Washington Street cousin into the little parlor: "But for that, we're all doing nicely—thank you!"

"Gracious, Hen! I'd no idea you had such a hospital. Why, what's the matter with Uncle John?"

"Oh, just his lumbago. He's complaining, but out and about—fighting over the Seven Days around Richmond with an old comrade somewhere, I doubt not.... Sit down, my dear," added Hen, who had been looking at Cally just a little curiously, "and excuse me while I run upstairs. I forgot to explain that this bottle is for mother, who's down with a splitting headache. Back in a jiffy...."

Thus Miss Cooney, not knowing that for one moment, at least, her society had been preferred above that of a Canning. Such was the odd little development. Carlisle, having been more with Henrietta in the past five weeks than she had commonly been in a year, had discovered her as undoubtedly a person you could talk things over with—-the only person in the world, perhaps, that you could talk *this* over with....

Possibly Hen, being a lynx-eyed Cooney, had somehow gathered that her lovely cousin had not dropped in merely to “inquire”; for when she returned to the parlor, having doubtless put her hot-water bottle where it would do the most good, she did not expend much time on reporting upon her invalids, or become involved in the minor doings of the day. Very soon she deflected, saying:

Page 130

“But you don’t look particularly fit yourself, Cally. What’s wrong with the world?”

Cally, being still uncertain how far she cared to confide in Hen, met the direct question with a tentative lightness.

“Oh!... Well, I *did* just have a rather unpleasant experience, though I didn’t know I showed it in my face!... We happened to look in at the Works for a few minutes—Mr. Canning and I—and I certainly didn’t *enjoy* it much ...” And then, the inner pressure overcoming her natural bent toward reserve, she spoke with a little burst: “Oh, Hen, it was the most horrible place I ever saw in my life!”

The little confidence spoke straight to the heart, as a touch of genuine feeling always will. Quite unconsciously, Henrietta took her cousin’s hand, saying, “You poor dear ...” And within a minute or two Cally was eagerly pouring out all that she had seen in the bunching-room, with at least a part of how it had made her feel.

Hen listened sympathetically, and spoke reassuringly. If her “arguments” followed close in the footsteps of Hugo,—for Hen was surprisingly well-informed in unexpected ways,—it must have been some quality in her, something or other in her underlying “attitude,” that invested her words with a new horsepower of solace. And Saltman’s best stenographer actually produced an argument that Hugo had altogether passed by. She thought it worth while to point out that these things were not a question of abstract morals at all, but only of changing points of view....

“When Uncle Thornton learned business,” declared Hen, “there wasn’t a labor law in the country—no law but supply and demand—pay your work-people as little as you could, and squeeze them all they’d stand for. Nobody ever *thought* of anything different. In those days the Works would have been a model plant—nine-hour day, high wages, no women working at night, no children....”

If Cally was not wholly heartened by words like these, she knew where the lack was. And perhaps Hen herself was conscious of something missing. For, having defended her uncle’s Works at least as loyally as she honestly could, she gave the talk a more personal tone, skirting those phases of the matter so new-thoughty that they had never even occurred to Hugo Canning.

“Cally, are you going to speak to Uncle Thornton about it—about your going there, I mean?”

“No, no!” cried Cally, hastily. “How could I? Of course I—realize that that’s the way business must be—as you say. What right have I, an ignorant little fool, to set up as papa’s critic?”

“Not at all—of course,” said Hen, giving her hand a little squeeze. “What I—”

“You surely can’t think that I ought to go and reprove papa for the way he runs his business—do you, Hen?... That I—I’m *responsible* in any way!”

Hen noted her cousin’s unexplained nervousness, and it may be she divined a little further. She answered no, not a bit of it. She said she meant to speak to him, not as a business expert, but only as his daughter. It was always a mistake to have secrets in a family, said Hen.

Page 131

Good advice, undoubtedly. Only Hen didn't happen to know the most peculiar circumstances....

The two girls sat side by side on a sofa that sorely needed the ministrations of an upholsterer. Hen was sweet-faced, but habitually pale, usually a little worn. Her eyes and expression saved her from total eclipse in whatever company; otherwise she would have been annihilated now by the juxtaposition of her cousin. Cally's face was framed in an engaging little turn-down hat of gold-brown and yellow, about which was carelessly festooned a long and fine brown veil. Hen, gazing rather wistfully, thought that Cally grew lovelier every year.

"I'll tell you, Cally!" she said, suddenly. "Do you know what you ought to do? Talk to V.V. about all this!"

Cally repressed a little start; though the thought, to speak truth, was far from being a new one. But how could she possibly talk to V.V. without the ultimate disloyalty to papa?...

"No," she said, quietly, after a brief pause. "I could hardly do that."

"Why not? He's thought out all these things further than anybody I know. And he'll—"

"Hen, have you forgotten what he wrote in the paper about papa last year—what he's going to write next month. Don't you see my position?"

"I don't care what he writes in the papers!... When it comes to people, there's nobody so kind—and wise. And—"

"He's the one person," said Cally, resolutely, "I could not possibly talk to about it."

Henrietta, falling back on the thought she had set out with, laughed good-naturedly.

"Then, I suppose, you'll want to fly at once. He's due here at any minute, you know—in fact, he's half an hour late now—"

"Here!... Is he coming here this afternoon?"

This time her start was without concealment. Hen looked genuinely surprised.

"He's our doctor—I told you the other day ... But he doesn't bite, my dear! You look as if I'd said that a grizzly bear and three mad ogres were loping down the steps."

"I never think of him as a doctor somehow," said Cally, recovering, with a little laugh. "So I couldn't imagine—"

“Second largest practice in town—only I’ll admit that his not charging any fees has something to do with it. In fact V.V.’s patients usually borrow anything that’s loose, including his hats, suits, and shoes ... Cally, it’s like a play, for I believe there he is now ...”

True enough, a firm but unequal footstep just then sounded on the Cooneys’ wooden steps outside. But Hen sat still, a far-away look in her eyes.

“Did you hear what Pond said, Cally, the first time he saw V.V.?—’Who’s that man with the face like a bishop that never grew up?’... Do you know, I never look at him without remembering mean things I’ve done and said, and wishing I hadn’t ...”

She rose as the bell rang, started toward the door, hesitated, turned in the middle of the floor.

Page 132

“I’d naturally ask him in here, Cally, while I went up to see if things are ready for him upstairs. Of course, if you’d rather not see him ...”

Cally had risen too. The two girls stood looking at each other.

“No,” said Cally, “I’d like to see him. Only I can’t speak to him about the Works. I cannot.”

“No, no—of course not, dear, if you don’t feel like it.”

Hen went out to open the door. Greetings floated in....

Cally stood at the parlor window, staring out into the shabby street. Over the way was the flaring sign of an unpained dentist, making promises never to be redeemed, and two doors away the old stand of the artificial limb-maker. Cally looked full at a show-window full of shiny new legs; but she did not see the grisly spectacle, so it did not matter.

The unexpected encounter was deeply disturbing to her. There stirred in her the memory of another night when she had similarly met the slum doctor in this room, between engagements with Hugo Canning. That night he had asked her forgiveness for calling her a poor little thing, which she was, and she had charged him with wicked untruthfulness for calling the Works homicidal, which—she said it in her secret heart—-they were.... How history repeats itself, how time brought changed angles! Strange, strange, that in the revolving months it had now come her turn to apologize to Mr. V.V. in the Cooney parlor. Only she could not make her apology, no matter how much she might want to....

“... Stop a minute,” Hen was heard to say, “and pass the time of day ...”

Unintelligible murmuring, and then: “D’you know who it was that invented stopping and passing the time of day?” said the nearing voice of Mr. V.V., gayer than Cally Heth had ever heard it. “Take my word, ’t was a woman.”

“To make things pleasant for some man!—and we’ve been doing it ever since.... Cally Heth’s here ...”

The two came in. Cally, turning, held out her hand to the Cooneys’ physician, with a sufficiently natural air and greeting....

They had not met since the afternoon at the Woman’s Club, a day which had brought a strange change in their relations. But then, each of their meetings seemed marked by some such realignment, and always to his advantage. Again and again she had put this man down, at first with all her strength; and each time when she turned and looked at him again, behold he had shot up higher than ever.

So Cally had just been thinking. But now that V. Vivian stood in the room, and she looked at him, she was suddenly reminded that he was her good friend nevertheless. And something like ease came back to her.

When Hen had disappeared to make the sick-room ready (or for whatever purpose she went), Cally said:

“I hope Chas isn’t really going to be ill?”

“Oh, there’s no trouble at all with him,” replied the young man, “but to make him stay in bed. It’s all come down to a touch of sore throat, a little sort of quinsy. We were rather afraid of diphtheria, the other night.”

Page 133

“My cousins are having more than their share, just now. So many, many invalids.... I hope you’ve been well, since I saw you last?”

“Oh, thank you!—I’ve the health of a letter-carrier. At least, I assume they’re naturally healthy, though as a matter of fact I’ve had three or four postmen on my list ... I’m afraid I interrupted you and Henrietta?”

“Oh, no!—Or rather, I imagine she was only too glad to be interrupted.... I was telling her all my troubles, you see.”

“Have you troubles? I’m sorry.”

The man spoke in a light tone, such as is suitable for friendships. Yet he must have felt a throe then, remembering his articles: now so soon to go to the “Chronicle” office and the print that cried aloud. And the girl’s case, had he but known it, was like his own, only more so. Beneath the cover of her casual talk, she was aware of thought coursing like a palpitating vein under a fine skin, threatening to break through at any minute....

“Oh, so many,” said Cally.

They had remained standing, for to ask the doctor to sit down had not occurred to her. The girl glanced toward the window.

“And what do you suppose Hen’s prescription was?... That I should take them all to you.”

There was the briefest silence.

“But, of course, you didn’t want to do that?”

She hesitated, and said: “Yes, I do want to ... But I can’t.”

That was the utmost that she meant to say. But then, as she glanced again at the lame alien whom time had so beautifully justified, more of her inner tide overflowed suddenly into speech.

“Do you know—I feel that I could tell you almost anything—things I wouldn’t tell Hen, or anybody.... Oh, I could, I don’t know why. You don’t know for what a long time I’ve thought of you as my confidant, my friend.... Only, you see—these troubles aren’t all my own....”

She stopped rather precipitately, turned away a little; stood twisting a glove between her fingers, and doing her best to show by her look that she had not said anything in particular....

The thoughts of these two were over hills and dales apart; and yet, by the nature of what was between them, they followed hard on the same trail. V.V. was far from possessing the Cooneys' detective gift. He saw only that this girl was troubled about something; and if his own thought never left the Heth Works, it was only because this was the point where his connection with her troubles cut him deep.

So in his ears chirped the voice of his now familiar: "Who appointed *you* a judge of people like this? Who knows better than you that they're doing the best they can? Tear up that stuff!..."

But aloud he said only: "I understand that, of course. And I'm grateful for the rest you say."

And Cally, five feet away from him, was learning that in some matters the business logic of it didn't help very much, that what counted was how you felt about them in your heart. If something terrible should happen at the Works *now*, if the building did fall down some day, collapsing with all those girls—did she think she could look again into this man's eyes and say: "Well, *I* had nothing to do with it?..."

Page 134

But neither were her thoughts for publication; and she bridged the brief gap in the conversation with a not particularly successful smile, designed to show that of course nobody was taking all this very seriously.

“But why expect to do what we want? No one can,” said she. “You don’t mind my fidgeting about the room this way, do you? I seem a little out of humor to-day—not myself at all, as I was told just now....”

V.V. said that he did not mind.

“I wonder,” she went on, “if you remember something you said in your speech the other day?—about being free.... It seemed strange to me then, that you should have happened to say just that, for I—I’ve come to realize that, in a kind of way, that’s always been a wild dream of my own.... Don’t you think—where there are so many things to think about, things and people—that it’s pretty hard to be free?”

“Hard?... There’s nothing else like it on earth for hardness.”

V.V. stood grasping the back of an ancient walnut chair. It was seen that he belonged in this room, simple home of poverty; different from the girl, who was so obviously the rich exotic, the transient angel in the house.

He added: “But it’s always seemed to me worth all the price of trying.”

“Oh, it is—I’m sure. And yet.... It seems to me—I’ve thought,” said Cally, somewhat less conversationally, “that life, for a woman, especially, is something like one of those little toy theatres—you’ve seen them?—where pasteboard actors slide along in little grooves when you pull their strings. They move along very nicely, and you—you might think they were going in that direction just because they wanted to. But they never get out of their grooves.... I know you’ll think that a—a weak theory.”

“No, I know it’s a true theory.”

Surely the girl could not have been thinking only of her father’s business as she went on, more and more troubled in voice:

“So much seems to be all fixed and settled, before one’s old enough to know anything about it—and then there’s a great deal of pressure—and a great deal of restraint—in so many different ways.... Don’t you think it’s hard ever to get out of one’s groove?”

“It’s heroic.”

She put back her trailing motor-veil, and said: “And for a woman especially?”

“It would take the strength of all the gods!... I mean, of course—as women are placed, to-day. Perhaps in some other day—perhaps to-morrow—”

He broke off suddenly; a change passed over his face.

“And yet,” he added, in a voice gentle and full of feeling—“some of them are doing it to-day.”

What his thought might be, she had no idea; but his personal implication was not to be mistaken. The man from the slums, who had mistakenly put his faith in her once before in the Cooneys’ parlor, conceived that she was or might be one of these strong he spoke of; little suspecting her present unconquerable weakness.

Page 135

Cally was startled into looking at him, a thing she had been rather avoiding; and looking, she looked instantly away. In Mr. V.V.'s eyes, that strange trusting look, which had not been frequently observable there of late, had saluted her like a banner of stars....

"Certainly I was not meant to be one of them," said she, rather faintly.

He must have meant only a general expression of confidence, she was sure of that; only to be kind and comforting. But to her, grappling with new hard problems, that strange gaze came like a torch lit in a cave at night. Much she had wondered how Vivian could possibly hold her responsible for what her father did, or left undone. And now in a flash it was all quite clear, and she saw that he had not been holding her responsible at all. No, this simple and good man, who let the crows bring his raiment, or not, as they preferred, had only reposed a trust in her—in Cally Heth. It was as if, that day at the Settlement, he had said to her, by his eyes: "I know *you*. Once *you* go to the Works, you won't rest till you've made things better...."

But instead of this making things better for Cally Heth now, it seemed to make them worse at once. She became considerably agitated; knew that he must see her agitation, and did not mind at all. And suddenly she sat down on the sway-backed sofa between the windows....

"I'm the last woman in the world ever to think of getting out of my groove," said Cally, her cheek upon her hand.

And then, with no premeditation at all, there came strange words from her, words clothing with unlessoned ease thoughts that certainly she had never formulated for Hugo Canning.

"And yet I feel that it might have been different. I've felt—lately—as if I haven't had much of a chance.... I think I have a mind, or had one ... some—some spirit and independence, too. But I wasn't trained to express myself that way; that was all ironed down flat in me. I never had any education, except what was superficial—showy. I was never taught to think, or to *do* anything—or to have any part in serious things. No one ever told me that I ought to justify my existence, to pay my way. Nobody ever thought of me as fit to have any share in anything useful or important—fit for any responsibility.... No, life for me was to be like butterflies flying, and my part was only to make myself as ornamental as I could...."

V. Vivian, who wrote articles about the Huns in newspapers, stood at the Cooney mantel. He did not move at all; the man's gaze upon her half-averted face did not wink once. His own face, this girl had thought, was one for strange expressions; but she might have thought the look it wore now stranger than any she had ever seen there....

Page 136

“Maybe, it’s that way with all women, more or less—only it seems to have been always more with me.... Money!” said the low hurried voice—“how I’ve breathed it in from the first moment I can remember. Money, money, money!... Has it been altogether my fault if I’ve measured everything by it, supposed that it was the other name for happiness—-taken all of it I could get? I’ve always taken, you see—never given. I never gave anything to anybody in my life. I never did anything for anybody in my life. I’m a grown woman—an adult human being—but I’m not of the slightest use to anybody. I’ve held out both hands to life, expecting them to be filled, kept full....”

She paused and was deflected by a fleeting memory, something heard in a church, perhaps, long ago....

“Isn’t there,” she asked, “something in the Bible about that?—horse-leech’s daughters—or something?—always crying ’*Give, give*’?...”

There was a perceptible pause.

“Well—something of the sort, I believe....”

She had seemed to have the greatest confidence that, if anything of the sort was in the Bible, this man would know it instantly. However, his tone caught her attention, and she raised her eyes. Mr. V.V.’s face was scarlet.

“I see,” said Cally, colorlessly, out of the silence, “you had already thought of me as one of those daughters.... Why not?”

“Of you! Not in my life,” cried V.V.... “I ... it’s—”

“Why shouldn’t you? I know that’s what I am. You’re—”

“*Don’t*.... I can’t let things be put upside down like that.”

His difficulties, in the unhappy moment, were serious. His skin had turned traitor to him, sold out his heart. And now, if he had the necessity of saying something, his was also the fear lest he might say too much....

“If I ... I appeared to look—conscious, when you asked me that, it was only because of the—the strange coincidence. I—you compel me to tell you—though it’s like something from another life.”

He paused briefly; and when he went on, his voice had acquired something of that light hardness which Cally had heard in it before now.

“Once, a year ago, when I had never so much as heard your name, Commissioner O’Neill and I happened to be talking about the local factory situation, about the point of

view of the owners or,—to be exactly honest,—the owners' families. By chance—I did use those words. And O'Neill said I was a wild man to talk so, that if I knew any of these people, personally, I'd never judge them so—so unkindly.... It was a long time before I saw ... how right he might be.... And that's what I tried to say to you the other day—when I spoke of *knowing the people*. I—"

"Yes, sometimes that makes a difference, I know." Had she not felt it only this afternoon? "But I'm afraid this isn't one of the times ..."

Cally rose, feeling that she desired to go. Nevertheless, glancing at his troubled face, she was suddenly moved by perhaps the most selfless impulse she had ever felt in her life.

Page 137

“Please,” she said, gently, “don’t mind about that. I liked you better for it. I like people to say what they think. I’ve—”

“Do you? Then allow me to say that I’m not quite a bitter fool....”

The young man was advancing toward her, throwing out his hands in a quaint sort of gesture which seemed to say that he had had about as much of this as he could stand.

“For surely I don’t think I am—I don’t think I’m quite so dumb and blind as you must think me....” His repressed air was breaking up rapidly, and now he flung out with unmistakable feeling: “Do you suppose I could ever forget what you did last May! Not if I tried a thousand years!” said Mr. V.V.... “How could I possibly think anything of you, after that, but all that is brave and beautiful?...”

The two stood looking at each other. Color came into Cally’s cheek; came but soon departed. The long gold-and-black lashes, which surely had been made for ornaments, fluttered and fell.

Out of the dead silence she said, with some difficulty:

“It’s very sweet of you to say that.”

Cally moved away from him, toward the door, deeply touched. She had wanted to hear such words as these, make no doubt of that. Among all her meetings with this man last year, she had only that May morning to remember without a stinging sense of her inferiority. And she supposed that he had forgotten....

“You see,” she said, not without an effort, “I have been telling you my troubles, after all.... I—I’m afraid I’ve kept them waiting for you upstairs. I must go.”

But she did not leave the parlor at once, even when Hen, hearing the door creak open, cried down that the infirmary was ready....

If Cally felt that she had somehow confessed her weakness to Mr. V.V.—about the Works, about life—and been forgiven by him, it seemed that even that did not quite settle it all. It must have been that one small corner of her mind refused to consider that all this was a closed episode.

She turned, with her hand on the knob.

“Shall you go to that meeting of Mr. Pond’s next Wednesday—his meeting for workers? He has asked me to go.”

The young man said that he would be at the meeting; that he hoped to see her there.

Cally hesitated again. Perhaps she thought of Hugo then; of perhaps the small unreconstructed corner of her mind grew more unrestful.

“I’m not sure that I’ll be able to go,” she said, slowly.... “Dr. Vivian—is your telephone number still the same—Meeghan’s Grocery? I—I may want to speak to you some time.”

Yes, it was just the same. Meeghan’s Grocery.

V.V. stood looking at her from the middle of the floor, one hand raised to his hair in his characteristic gesture. His old-fashioned sort of face wore a faraway look, not so much hopeful now as wistful; a look which had been moving to Cally Heth, even in the days when she had tried to dislike him. But of this, the young man from the lonely outskirts was not aware; of the nature of his replies he had taken no note. In his ears whispered the subtlest of all his many voices: “She’ll never speak to you, once that’s printed. Tear it up. You’ve a right to your youth....”

Page 138

“Good-bye,” said Cally, “and thank you.”

“Miss Heth,” said Vivian, starting, hurriedly—“I—if I—if it should ever happen that I could *help* you in any way—it’s not likely, of course, I understand that—but if it *should* ever happen so—*promise* me that you’ll send for me.”

But the girl did not make that promise then, her reply being: “You *have* helped me—you *must* know that.... You’re the one person in the world who has.”

* * * * *

Cally walked home alone, in the dying effects of a lovely afternoon.

She had left the Cooney parlor in the vein of one emerging from strange adventures in undiscovered countries. This queer feeling would hardly last over the solid threshold of Home, whose atmosphere was almost notoriously uncongenial to eccentricities of that sort. But it did linger now, as Cally trod somewhat dreamily over streets that she had long known by heart. Four blocks there were; and the half-lights flickering between sky and sidewalk were of the color of the girl’s own mood.

In this moment she was not troubled with thought, with the drawing of moral lessons concerning duty or otherwise. Now Mr. V.V.’s unexpected last speeches to her seemed wholly to possess her mind. She was aware that they had left her curiously humbled.... Strange it seemed, that this man could be so unconscious of the influence he had upon her, had clearly had even last year. Stranger yet that he, whom only the other day she had thought of as so narrow, so religiously hard, should prove himself absurdly over-generous in his estimate of her.... Or no, not that exactly. But, at least, it would have been absurd, if it had not been so sweet....

The revolting corner of her mind seemed now to have laid down arms. Perhaps the girl’s vague thought was that the feelings roused in her in the bunching-room had, after all, been unreasonable, even hysterical, as Hugo had plainly enough stated, as Hen herself had partly argued. Perhaps it was merely that all that trouble would keep, to be quietly pondered over at a later time. But rather, it seemed as if a mist had settled down over the regions of practical thought, hiding problems from view. The Works had somehow been swallowed up in that apologia she had made, Cally Heth’s strange apology to Mr. V.V. for herself and her life.

Cally walked slowly along the familiar street, her thoughts a thousand miles in the blue. If the words of the good young man had humbled her, they had also mysteriously stirred and uplifted. She thought of his too trusting tribute, she thought of what they had said about women, their strength and their hope of freedom; and the misty pictures in her mind were not of herself—for well she had felt her weaknesses this day—but rather they were of a dim emerging ideal, of herself as she might some day hope to be. Vague

aspirations were moving in her; new reachings of the spirit; dreams that spoke with strange voices....

Page 139

And, companied by these ethereal fancies, she came, before she was aware of it, to the substantial steps of Home, where began the snuggest of all snug grooves....

She arrived with the intention, already well formed, of retiring forthwith to her room, and —probably—spending the whole evening there. But here, as it chanced, interruption fell across her thought. Just at her own door, Cally almost ran into a man who was standing still upon the sidewalk, as if waiting for some one: a tall old gentleman standing and leaning upon his cane. Cally came out of her absorption just in time to escape collision.

“I beg your pardon!...” she began, with manner, stepping back.

But then her feet faltered, and her voice died suddenly away, as she saw that this silent old man was her neighbor, Colonel John B. Dalhousie, whom she had never spoken to in her life.

The Colonel was regarding her with frightening fixity. The girl’s descent from the empyrean to reality had the stunning suddenness of a fall: she showed it in her blanching face. Now, as the two thus stood, the old man raised a hand and swept off his military hat in a bow of elaborate courtesy.

“An apology from Miss Heth,” said he, in a purring voice, “is the last thing on earth one of my name would have ventured to expect.”

Doubtless the meeting had been obliged to come some day: Cally had often thought of it with dread, once escaped it by a narrow margin. That it should have come now, in the gentler afterglow of this curiously disturbing day, seemed like the grimness of destiny.... No fear of over-generosity here; no gleam in these eyes of brave and beautiful things....

“But you ask my pardon,” the smooth-cutting voice went on. “It is granted, of course, my dear. You took my son’s heart, and broke it, but that’s a bauble. You took his honor, and I kicked him out, but honor’s a name in a printed book. You took his life, and I buried him, but sons, we know, cannot live forever. What is there here to make a father’s heart grow hard?”

Cally raised her hand to her throat. She felt suffocating, or else a little faint. From life she seemed to have stepped into the house of dead men’s bones; and here she could see at play old emotions not met before in her guarded life: shrivelling contempt, undying hatred, immortal unforgiveness. Nevertheless, the subtlest stroke in the naked confrontation was that something in the father’s expression, distorted though it was, reminded her of the son, whose face in this world she should see no more.

She tried to move past the face of her Nemesis, appeared physically incapable of motion; tried to speak, and had little more success.

“I—I’m—very sorry—for—” she said, indistinctly, and her ears were mocked with her ghastly inadequacy. “I—I’ve—”

“Sorry? Why, of course you are. Doubtless the little unpleasantness has marred your happiness at times. But I am gratified to know that you have other young men for your amusement, now that my son has withdrawn himself from your reach.”

Page 140

The old Colonel stooped further, brought his stabbing gaze nearer her. There were heavy yellow pouches under his eyes; his lower lip, not hidden by the stained white mustaches, twitched spasmodically.

“God looked and repented him that he had made man. I might wish that he’d made you a man—for just five minutes. But what do you imagine he thinks when he contemplates you and your work, my dear? Eh?... little she-devil, pretty little hell-cat!...”

Cally smothered a little noise between a cry and a sob. She started away, by sheer strength of horror; somehow got away from the terrible old face, ran up her own steps. Glancing whitely over her shoulder from this secure coign, she saw that Jack Dalhousie’s father still stood unmoving on her sidewalk, staring and leaning on his cane....

She closed the door quickly, shutting out the sight.

XXX

How it sounded like an Epitaph, but still she would not cry; how she thinks of the Beach again, and hugs a Hateful Word to her Bosom; and Hugo starts suddenly on a sort of Wedding-Trip.

In her own room Carlisle was seized with a wild desire to cry. Her spirit, shocked past bearing, demanded this instant relief. But she fought down the loosening impulses within her, knowing their worse than uselessness; she had shed her heart’s tears for this before now. And her need now was for strength; strength to meet her mother when need be, against whom key nor bolt brought privacy: strength, above all, to wipe out this mark set upon her forehead....

She resisted the impulse to fling herself face downward upon the bed, which would have been fatal; kept stoutly upon her feet. And presently, summoning all her courage, she stood at the window and peeped, pale-faced, between the curtains. All was well down there now. The old avenger was gone. There were only people passing serenely over the familiar sidewalk, and the sunlight dying where she had stood and learned just now that a lie has a long life.

Yes, the Colonel was gone: and with him, so it seemed, all veils and draperies, all misty sublimations. One doesn’t idealize one’s self too much, with curses ringing in one’s ears.

Cally leaned weakly against the wall, both gloved palms pressed into the cold smoothness of her cheeks. Somewhere in the still house a door suddenly banged shut, and she just repressed a scream....

Old Colonel Dalhousie did not deal in moral subtleties, that was clear. Regret, penitence, sufferings, tears, or dreamy aspiration: he did not stay to split such hairs as these. His eye was for the large, the stark effect. And by the intense singleness of his vision, he had freighted his opinions with an extraordinary conviction. He had shouted down, as from a high bench, the world's judgment on the life of Cally Heth.

Twenty-four years and over she had lived in this town; and at the end to be called a she-devil and a hell-cat.

Page 141

The girl's bosom heaved. She became intensely busy in the bedroom, by dint of some determination; taking off her street things and putting them painstakingly away, straightening objects here or there which did very well as they were. Flora knocked, and was sent away. On the mantel was discovered a square lavender box, bearing a blazoned name well known in another city. Fresh flowers from Canning, these were; and Carlisle, removing the purple tinsel from the bound stems, carefully disposed the blossoms in a bowl of water. Once in her goings and comings, she encountered her reflection in the mirror, and then she quickly averted her eyes. One glance of recognition between herself and that poor frightened little thing, and down would come the flood-gates, with profitless explanations to follow in a certain quarter. She avoided that catastrophe; but not so easily did she elude the echoing words of her neighbor the Colonel, which were like to take on the inflection of an epitaph....

After a time, when the dread of weeping had waned, Cally threw herself down in her chaise-longue near the window, and covered her eyes with her hand. And now with all her will—and she had never lacked for will—she strove to take her mind from what no piety or wit could now amend: struggling to think and remember how she had tried once, at a price, to set right that wrong she had done. For other comfort there was none: what she had written, she had written. She might give her life to the ways of Dorcas; she might beat her breast and fill her hands with pluckings of her gay hair. But she could not bring Dalhousie back to life now, or face his poor father as a girl who had done no wrong....

* * * * *

Life in the House moved on. There was a caller or two, who found the ladies excused; there was a telephone summons from Miss Evelyn McVey, whose desire it was to entertain Mr. Canning at dinner, but who now met only with a maid's message; and then, toward seven, there came mamma herself, who was, of course, not so lightly to be disposed of.

But Cally had fortified herself for the little visit, and passed the inspection without mishap. Mrs. Heth was acquiescent enough in her daughter's desire to dine upstairs, which saved the bother of hunting up another man in Hugo's stead, though involving regrettable waste of two covers already prepared. Mamma lingered for fifteen minutes making arch, tactful inquiries about the afternoon; but she noticed nothing more than was accountable for by the slight headache to which Carlisle frankly admitted. The little general's side remarks conceded no doubt whatever that Hugo would present himself very shortly indeed after dinner, for resumption of the agreeable matter in hand. They should have the library to themselves, she promised, company or no company....

Cally dined at a reading-table, set by the fire. Later, when the tray was gone and she was alone again, she relapsed into thoughts which had gained unwonted lucidity and vigor.

Page 142

She had been thinking of the night, a year ago this month, to which everything in her life since seemed to run straight back. She had not certainly calculated the ruin of Dalhousie that night: rather her lack was that she had hardly cared what she did to him. In that narrow circle of engrossments where she had moved, mistaking it for the living universe, the great want, so it seemed now, was that she had never been asked to measure herself by moral standards at all. What she got: this was all that people looked at here, and according to this she had well managed her affairs, snug in the snugness of the horse-leech's daughters. She had been all for the walled little island, —as she had heard it called,—the island of the upward bound, where self-propelment was the test of right or wrong, and a marriage well above her the touchstone of a girl's sound morality. On this island such as Jack Dalhousie had no merit. What simpler than to kick him off, and turn away with your fingers in your ears?...

Improbable people these, no doubt, if you were of those who judged people by what they did, and never by what they had; hell-cats, perhaps, if you happened to be a father thus made sonless....

Her abasement now fairly met the portrait of her sketched by a stranger two hours since; outran what another stranger had said to her, one night in a summer-house. She looked back over a year, and seemed to see herself as truly one empty within, a poor little thing; common in her whole outlook, vulgar in her soul.... Yes, *vulgar*. Let her hug the hateful word to her bosom. How else could she have been made to feel so again and again, by an obscure youth who had no power over anybody but that he had kept his own face turned toward the stars?...

And when Cally's thoughts turned toward this present, struggling to show beyond doubt that that girl and this were not one, they ran perpetually into that new cloud of her own weakness which had unrolled above her to-day, and now spread and blackened over the skies.

And yet she felt that it was not cowardice that tied her hands against the fainting girls in the bunching-room. Her strung nerves had carried it all deeper than that. She had spied on her father, found him out in guilt; he, it seemed, must for years have been leading a double life that would not bear looking at. How bring herself to confront papa, who had always been so affectionate and generous to her, with his discovered secret?...

If she but had some right, even, some standing from which to speak.... And here her new resolve was that when she saw Dr. Vivian at the Settlement next week, she would consult him directly: now asking him to say, not that she had no responsibilities about her father's business, but that she had them in abundance.

But deeper than this, beneath all the flutterings of her mind, there ran the increasing sense that, whatever the logic of it might be, responsibility was on her nevertheless: the supreme responsibility put upon free beings by the trust of a friend....

Page 143

* * * * *

Hugo, it was presumable, would be detained with his Mr. Deming until the latter's departure, or near it. He could hardly appear before nine o'clock, or even nine-thirty; and perhaps he might not come at all. Cally had felt unable to agree with her mother's theory that she was required to sit awaiting Hugo's convenience there. At all events, she had early resolved to settle the point by definitely "retiring" before his possible arrival; relying upon a worse aching head to justify her with mamma, who was not of the few to be favored with fuller confidences.

But a little after eight, when this resolve was almost ready to shape into the deed, the sensible reasoning on which it was based was suddenly upset. The maid Flora came, bringing a new message from the preoccupied lover, brief but decisive.

The business entanglements, it appeared, had only got worse with talking. Hugo, beyond all expectation, found himself compelled to go back to Washington with his law-partner to-night; possibly to go on to New York to-morrow. Would Carlisle accordingly arrange to see him now, for a few moments?

"*Now?*"

"Yas'm, he say as soon as you c'd make it convenient."

The girl had risen sharply in the first complete surprise of Flora's message; she walked hastily across her floor. But having done these things, she did not at once give the obviously due reply. She stood by her dressing-table, staring fixedly at the colored woman, the aimless fingers of her left hand continually pulling out and putting back the silver top of a squat cut-glass bottle. She appeared to be thinking, weighing pros and cons: processes surely unnecessary to a pasteboard actor, sliding smoothly toward a manifest destiny.

She stood this way so long and so silent that Flora prompted with a giggle and further information.

"Miss Cyahlile, he say if you was to answer no, to say could he please speak to you a minute on the 'phone."

Upon that Miss Carlisle was seen to replace the bottle stopper with consciousness of movement, and to turn her slate-blue eyes briefly toward the ceiling, with no movement of her head at all.

"Very well ... Say that I'll see him at half-past eight, for a few minutes."

Flora, naturally, was not a woman without understanding the sign language of her sex. It might be that she had learned the color of the Canning money—and she had—but her dusky heart, like yours or mine, was not for sale.

“Yas’m—certny ... Yas’m. Or, Miss Cyahlile—I *mout* just say we ’re mighty sorry—but not knowin’ he was expected, and you feelin’ po’ly an’ all—you just this minute went to baid—an’—”

“No!—do as I say,” said the young mistress, quite sharply. But, as her faithful friend turned away, she added in another voice: “You’re a good girl, Flora.... Be sure to say just for a few minutes.”

Page 144

After the solitude and meditation came action at speed.

The maid vanished, the mistress slipped off her flowered negligee and drew hot water in the bathroom. She proceeded, with no want of experience or skill, to make herself beautiful for her lover: the lover who had seemed over a gulf from her this afternoon, and now what worlds away.... And if the rites were done somewhat hurriedly perforce, there was no lack of conscientiousness here. She, who had said that she had never paid her way through life, could only pay in what coin she had....

Events moved quickly. Flora, who was "on the doorbell" to-night because of the dinner-party, was soon back to say that Mr. Canning was in the library. She was sent ahead to make sure that the coast was clear.

Cally, in a soft black house-dress with an apricot waist-ribbon, went down the back-stairs. She passed through the busy pantry, where Moses and Annie were just ready for an expert entrance with the fish; went through the back hall, where Flora stood flashing her teeth beside the closed door of the dining-room; came to the side door of the library. This door Cally opened, and shut it again behind her....

It was a massive and dark-beamed room, softened now with the light of lamps and fire. Hugo stood in the middle of it, turning quickly at the sound of the door. He, whose afternoon had taken a course so different from his planning, still wore the clothes he had had on then, a dark gray walking-suit which well became his fine-figured masculinity. Over his brow there hovered a vexed business frown, nor did this altogether vanish as he advanced upon Carlisle, a lover's welcome springing imperiously into his eyes.

"Isn't this the devil's own luck?... Deming insists it all depends on me."

"You go at nine-thirty?"

"He says he'll manacle me if necessary. It's confoundedly important, you see—there are large interests involved. You know I wouldn't go otherwise. Don't you?"

"And to-morrow you go on to New York?"

"No!—There's only the remotest chance. I'll go bail to be back here to-morrow at five o'clock."

"Oh!... I—the message I got—"

"I put that in only to make absolutely sure of getting you.... Growing cunning, you see."

"Oh—I didn't understand," said Cally, colorlessly, continuing to look down at her pink fingernails.

She seemed to think of nothing further to say, but that appeared to make no great difference. Hugo moved nearer. If he had remembered his thought about her being too sure of him, it may be that the sight of her had rushed his senses, as it had often done before.

“You were so unlike your natural dear self this afternoon,” he said, on the wooing note; and suddenly he had possessed himself of both her hands. “To-night—and we’ve only such a little time—you are going to make it all up to me ... Aren’t you?”

Page 145

Finding herself captured, the girl hastily raised eyes dark with trouble, looking at her lover for the first time. And so looking, she took her hands from his grasp with a hastiness which might have been a little rasping to a morbidly sensitive man.

“Don’t!—please don’t! I—don’t like to be touched.... I—I can only act as I feel, Hugo.”

She turned away hurriedly, passed him and went over to the fireplace. There she stood quite silent before the dull red glow, locking and unlocking her slim fingers, and within her a spreading coldness.

Behind her she heard the thundering feet.

“I hoped, you see,” said Hugo’s voice, disappointed, but hardly chagrined, “that you would be feeling a little more—well, like your own natural self, after your rest ... Particularly as all our plans for these two days have been so upset.”

She replied, after a pause, in a noticeably constrained voice: “I haven’t said that I don’t feel my natural self. That’s only your—your interpretation of what you don’t like.... I—-that seems to be just the trouble between us.”

“Now, now!—my *dear* Cally!” said Hugo, soothing, if somewhat wearied to see still another conversation drifting toward the argumentative. “There’s no trouble between us at all. I, for one, have put our little disagreement to-day out of my head entirely. I do feel that there’s not much happiness in these so-called modernisms, but don’t let’s spoil our few minutes.... Why, Carlisle!” said Hugo, in another voice. “Why, what’s the matter?”

She had astonished him by suddenly laying her arm upon the mantel, and burying her face in the curve of it. So close Canning stood now that he could have taken her in his arms without moving; but some quality in her pose discouraged the idea that she might desire comfort that way.

Carlisle’s difficulties, indeed, were by no means over for the day. The conviction which had come upon her with the first full view of her lover’s face—where Colonel Dalhousie seemed also to have set his afflicting mark—had suddenly grown overwhelming. She had made her draft for payment against an account where there were no more funds.

“Are you ill?”

“No,” she answered, straightening at once.... “I ... I’m afraid—this is my natural self.”

“Something troubles you?” said Hugo, with penetration.

She nodded, and turned away.

She had always been capable of independent action; it was her chief strength, however mamma might speak of flare-ups. But never in her womanhood had she felt less in tune for heroics and a scene. Life was shaking to pieces all around her.

“Hugo,” she began, with difficulty, playing at arranging a slide of books on the table with hands like two blocks of ice ... “I—I hesitated about coming down at all, but now—I think ... As you are going away to-night, and would be coming back to-morrow entirely on my account ... I think I ought—”

Page 146

“Why, my dear! What’s all this about?... Do you mean you’ve let your feelings be hurt by my going off? Why, you—”

“It isn’t that.”

The nature of his understanding seemed to stir something in her, and she went on in a rather steadier voice:

“I’ve been thinking of something you said to me once—that I wasn’t the girl you had asked to marry you ... It’s taken me a long time, but I’ve learned that that was the truth. I’m not—”

She was checked, to her surprise, by a soft laugh.

“So that’s been it!... I never imagined—no wonder!... Why, Cally! How could you suppose I meant it? Don’t you know I was angry that day?—off my head? Would I—”

“But it’s true! I’m not that girl at all—I feel differently—I—”

“Well! Let’s not waste good time in mare’s nests of *that* sort. Why, dear little girl, would I be here now, if I wasn’t satisfied as no other man on earth—”

“But I’m not satisfied, Hugo.”

Cally turned now, faced him fully, a faint color coming into her cheek. In the man’s handsome eyes she had surprised an unmistakable complacence.

“I’m not satisfied,” she said, hurriedly, “to know that we are miles apart, and drifting further every minute. Don’t you see there’s no sympathy—no understanding—between us? What interests me, appeals to me, what is really my natural self—that only annoys you, makes you think—”

“I’ve been at fault there, I own,” he interrupted, soothingly, nodding his head respectfully up and down. “To tell the truth, I’ve been so immensely interested in *you*,—in Carlisle the woman,—that I haven’t seemed able to make proper allowance for your—your other interests. I promise to turn over a new leaf there. And, on your side, I am sure, you do realize, Carlisle—”

“Hugo,” said the girl, desperately, “you don’t understand me. I am trying to say that I can’t marry you. I cannot.”

Then the faint hum of voices from the dining-room down the hall became quite audible in the library. By the ebbing of color from Hugo’s virile face, Cally knew that she had penetrated his satisfaction at last; but by the look in his eyes she learned that she had lodged no conviction in him.

“I hesitated when you asked me in September,” said she, slowly, and trying her best to make her voice sound firm. “I should have made up my mind sooner—I’ve been to blame. I’m sorry to—”

He said in a slightly hoarsened voice: “What has happened since I left you this afternoon?”

What, indeed? Everything seemed to have happened.

“Something did happen ... But I—I don’t think there’s any use to talk about it.”

“Tell me what has happened. I have a right to know.”

“I will, if you wish—but it won’t do any good.... I went out, to my cousins’. And at the door, as I came back, I—I met Colonel Dalhousie. He stopped me ... expressed his opinion of me. He said things that I—I—”

Page 147

She stopped precipitately, with a break in her voice; turned from him.

“Oh!—I understand ... Poor little girl.”

At the mention of the name of ill omen, Canning’s strong heart had missed a beat. He had thought the old corpse buried past exhumation; the sudden rising of the ghost to walk had staggered for an instant even his superb incredulities. But with that sudden tremulousness of hers, he was himself again, or almost, with a new light upon her whole strange and unreliable demeanor. Small wonder, after such an encounter, if she was brought to the verge of hysteria, her feminine reason unseated, her mind wandering mistily over the forgotten past....

He tried to take at least one hand in loving sympathy, but found that the matter could not be arranged.

“The shock has upset you—poor darling! I understand. No wonder!...”

“No—I’m not upset ... I—Hugo, I can’t marry you. I’m truly sorry—I’ve tried—but now I’m quite sure—”

“But this is madness,” said Hugo’s queer voice. “Don’t you see it is as you say the words?... Not marry me—because an old ruffian waylaid you, called you—hard names—”

“No, but because what he said was true. No—of course that’s not the reason ... I must tell you the truth ...”

Cally lifted misty eyes, beneath which faint circles were beginning to appear, and said with sadness:

“Hugo, I don’t love you.”

Then she watched, painfully, the last remnants of his assurance drop away from his face: and after that, she saw, with a certain fear, that she had still to make herself believed.

Hugo, supported not merely by his own justifiable confidences but by her mother’s affirmations, could, indeed, put no credence in his ears. Many explanations were possible for this extraordinary feminine perversity; she had happened to mention the one explanation that was not possible.

“You don’t know what you’re saying,” he began, huskily, out of the silence. “You’re not yourself at all nowadays ... Full of new little ideas. You’ve taken a whim, because an old rascal ... whom I shall punish as he deserves—”

“No ... That helped me to make up my mind, perhaps. But I’ve learned I’ve never loved you—since you left me last year.”

Cally moved away from Hugo, not caring to witness the breaking-up of his self-control. She leaned against the heavy mahogany table, clenching a tiny handkerchief between chill little hands. If the months had brought her perfect vengeance on the man who had once failed her in her need, she was finding it, indeed, a joyless victory.

“I’m to blame for not telling you before—when you were here last month,” she said, with some agitation ... “Only I really didn’t know my own mind ... All summer I seemed to ... just to take it for granted that—everything was the same—that I still cared for you. But —Hugo, I don’t. I’m sorrier than I can say for what has been my fault....”

Page 148

The young man had been standing like one in a trancelike illness, who can hear, indeed, with horrible distinctness, but can neither move nor speak. But now the increasing finality of her words seemed all at once to galvanize him; he shook himself slightly and took one heavy step forward.

“What you need is a protector, little girl—a man. I know about the summer—I suffered, too.... Of course. And in the loneliness—you’ve let yourself be affected.... The unrest of the day—”

“No, no! *Please*,” said she, almost ready to scream—“don’t think this is one of my new little ideas you speak of. I—it’s true that we don’t seem to think alike about things.... But I’d never have noticed that at all if I loved you. I’d want to think and do only as you wished. But I don’t—”

“I’ve spoiled you ... letting you think you could have your way with me,” said Hugo, in his thick and gritty voice. “You’re mad to-night, little girl ... aren’t responsible for what you say....”

Flicked in her spirit, she broke across his argument with a changed voice and gaze.

“Why is it madness not to love you?”

“It’s not a thing to argue about now, I say. You do love me ... I know it. You’ll marry me next month, that I swear. Why—”

“No!—when I love, I want to look up, and when I marry, I’ll marry above me....”

That checked his queer truculence; and Cally, desperate with the need to drive home her meaning, swept on with no more nervousness.

“And—don’t you see?—I’ve not been able to look up to you since that day last year.... The day—I’m sorry to have to say it—when you came all the way down from New York to show me that you didn’t care for a woman who was getting new little ideas about telling the truth....”

Canning’s face was the color of chalk, his look increasingly stony; in his eyes strange passions mounted. Now he seemed, to intend to say something, but the girl’s words flowed with gathering intensity.

“Why, think what you did that day, Hugo!—*think, think!* If I needed a protector and a man,—and I did,—that was the time for you to show me how protectors and men can act and love. If I was wrong, it seems to me that was the time of all times when you ought to have stood by me, protected me. But I was *right*—don’t you know I was?... I—it was the first time I had ever thought about doing right—and *you threw me over for it*.... Of course I know there was a quarrel, but—you know perfectly well what you said.

You said then, just as you say now, that I was shocked out of my senses, didn't know what I was saying. And then you said that people would point at me to the longest day I lived, so the thing to do was to hush it all up, or else I wasn't the girl you had asked to be your wife. Anything—anything—except that I should tell the truth.... So you went off and left me to bear it all alone. And then,

Page 149

when my heart had been broken into little pieces, when I'd cried my eyes out a hundred times, then, when all the trouble was over, and people weren't cutting me on the street, —then you came back. And even then you never said once that you were ashamed, or sorry for the way you'd treated me. You just came back, when I'd fought it all out without you, and whistled, and thought that I'd tumble into your arms.... Oh, it's natural, I suppose, for a woman to lie and be mean, and afraid of what people will say—for that seems to be the—the way they're brought up.... But—but—"

Her voice, which had begun to trail a little, dropped off into silence. She turned away; made a visible effort to control herself. And then there floated again into the still room the sounds of muffled revelry: strong Mrs. Heth making merry with her friends, a few of the best people....

"But I only hurt your feelings for nothing," said the girl, in quite a gentle voice.... "Hugo, try to forgive me if I've done you any wrong. But ... you—you have your train to make. Don't you think you'd better go now?"

Hugo's extraordinary reply was to seize her in his arms.

"Go?... Yes, and take you with me ... you little witch. Why, you're raving, little witch," said the hoarse, violent voice in her ear. "Gone out of your head with notions.... D'you think I'll let your life and mine be spoiled for a few minutes' crazy madness? You need to remember you're a woman, that's all.... Don't struggle. It's no use."

Her wild efforts to release herself, indeed, only drew his embrace tighter. His cheek rested upon her hair.

"Don't struggle, little witch. You've had your head too long. I'll make up your mind for you. You're going to marry me now. To-night. Don't tire yourself so. It's all settled. You belong to me—you see that now, don't you?..."

Now his hand was beneath her chin; he raised the still face she had kept so resolutely buried against his breast. And Cally felt his burning kiss upon her forehead, her cheek, upon lips that would nevermore be his.

"Little temptress ... you were so anxious for me to love you last year.... Doesn't this teach you that I'll never give you up? It's all settled now. We'll be married at once. I'll hold you this way—kiss you this way—till you learn to do what I say. Then you'll go up and put on travelling-clothes. Never mind lug...."

His wedding-trip ended in the middle of a word. His clasp had been weakened by that hand he had raised, and with the sudden strength of desperation his bride had broken from him. In an instant she had put the table between them.

Over ten feet of lamplit space, the lovers of yesteryear regarded each other. Both were white, both trembling. The girl now suffered a brief collapse; her face dropped into her upraised hands, through which, presently, her voice came brokenly:

"*Go!*... Go, I beg you...."

Page 150

Canning stood panting, shaken and speechless. Upon him was the last measure of defeat. He had staked his passion and his pride in the supreme attack, and had been crushingly repulsed. Doubt not that he read the incredible portents in the heavens now. His face went from chalk to leaden gray.

He drew his tongue once across his lips, and said, just articulately:

“If I go—out of this room—alone ... as God lives, you’ll never see me again.”

It must have been something in Hugo’s difficult voice, surely nothing in the words, that set a chord to stirring in Cally. She took her eyes from her hands, glanced once at his subtly distorted face. And then she stood silent by the barrier table, looking down, knotting and unknotting her yellow sash-ends....

That other night of humiliation in the library, which she had never been able to forget, had risen swiftly on the wings of memory. But, curiously, she felt no such uprush of shame now; her fury mysteriously ebbed from her. Even in this moment, still trembling from his familiar handling, still with the frightening sense of her life going to ruin about her, she felt a rising pity for her prince of lovers whom time and circumstance had brought to this....

“Perhaps,” said she, out of the silence, in almost a natural tone, “I ought to feel very—-angry and—and indignant.... But I don’t. I only feel sad.... Hugo, why need there be any bitterness between us? We’ve both made a mistake, that’s all, and I feel it’s been my fault from the beginning. If you seem to take me—rather—lightly.... I must have taught you to think of me that way.... And you’ll soon see how—how superficial my attraction for you was, soon forget....”

Strangely, these mild words seemed to affect Hugo more than anything done or said before. In fact, he appeared unable to bear them. He had checked her speech suddenly by lifting his hand, in a vague way, to his head; and now, without a word, he turned away, walking blindly toward the door.

She, in silence, followed his going with dark eyes that looked half ready to weep.

By the door into the hall, through which she had come a little while before, the broken young man paused. His face was stony gray, touched with livid streaks. Standing, he looked unseeingly about the room, around and over her; then at last at her. It had seemed to be his intention to say something, to claim the woman’s privilege of the last word. But now, when the moment arrived, there came no words.

For once Hugo must be indifferent to anti-climax, must fail to leave a lady’s presence with an air. Standing and looking, he suddenly flung out one arm in a wild, curious gesture; and on that he opened the door, very quickly.

The door shut again, quietly enough. And that was all. The beginning at the Beach had touched an end indeed. Hugo was gone. His feet would thunder this way no more.

Page 151

* * * * *

But the latter end of these things was not yet. One doesn't, of course, kick out of one's groove for nothing.

Cally, returning after a time to her own room, did not go at once to bed, much as she would have liked to do that. She sat up, fully dressed, by a dying fire, waiting for what must come. She waited till quarter to eleven, so long did the dinner-guests linger downstairs. But it came at last, just as she had known it would: on gliding heels, not knocking, beaming just at first....

The interview lasted till hard upon midnight. When it ended, both women were in tears. Cally retired to a fitful rest. At nine o'clock next morning, papa telephoned for Dr. Halstead, who came and found temperature, and prescribed a pale-green medicine, which was to be shaken well before using. The positive command was that the patient should not get out of bed that day.

And Cally did not get up that day, or the next, or the next. She lay abed, pale and uncommunicative, denying herself even to Mattie Allen, but less easily shutting herself from the operations of her mind.

And at night, when the troubled brain slips all control, she dreamed continually of horrors. Horrors in which neither Hugo nor mamma had part: of giant machines crashing through floors upon screaming girls, of great crowded buildings falling down with frightful uproars and bedlam shrieks. Through these phantasms the tall figure of Colonel Dalhousie perpetually moved, smiling softly. But when Cally met the doctor of the Dabney House in her dreams, the trust was gone from his eyes.

XXXI

Second Cataclysm in the House; of the Dark Cloud obscuring the New Day, and the Violets that had faded behind a Curtain, *etc*.; but chiefly of a Little Talk with Mamma, which produced Moral Results, after all.

The foolish nightmares receded; the sad faces of a dream dwindled again into air; and she waked suddenly in the sunshine to find herself quite well. This she knew with the first opening of her eyes. The familiar objects in the room, the face of the morning, wore the unmistakable *well* look. Wellness there seemed within, too, refreshment in body, mind, and spirit. Life called to the young and the strong, and the sunlight, streaming royally through the shuttered windows, was the ringing reveille of a new day....

But Cally Heth, having waked to life, lay on in bed. She heard the summons, was strong to answer it; but was held back as by a high surrounding wall. She was like a

tied bird, unfolding wings with the heart to soar, and continually brought down by the shortness of her tether.

Page 152

She had waked to overspreading gloom in the House of Heth; but this she could have fronted cheerfully to-day, fortified to charm it away, for herself and others. If events of late had been sweeping her along too fast, one emotion crowded unsteadyingly upon another, nature, stepping in, had put the gentle punctuation where it was needed. Hers was the resilience of youth. And the second cataclysm in the House, even at its worst (which was what mamma had made it), was hardly comparable to the first. There was no spiritual abasement this time, no sense of calamity and worlds at end. Rather, indeed, the contrary: and it was here that was found the seriousness of it all, in that now the smash-up was her own deliberate doing. Cally had hardly needed her mother's savage outbreak to make her feel how definite a parting was here with the ideals and aspirations of a lifetime. She saw that one whole phase of her girlhood had passed away forever. Or, it might be, this that she had said good-bye to was the dim figure of her girlhood itself....

In these thoughts there was sadness, naturally. Hugo's going had been with the noises of breakage, the reverberations of the day of judgment. But Cally had had four days to put her house in order; and she felt that she would have waked almost happy to-day, but for this stranger cloud that still hung so dark upon the horizon....

It was such a day as October in this climate brings week on week, gloriously golden. Cally breakfasted in bed. Toward ten o'clock, as she was slowly dressing with the maid's assistance, word came that her mother desired her presence in the administrative bedroom below.

"Very well, Annie," said the girl, listlessly. "I'll be down in a few minutes."

The message came as something of a surprise, though a disciplinary intent was easily surmised behind it. In the interview the other night, mamma had formally washed her hands of Cally and all her flare-ups, more than intimating that henceforward they would live as comparative strangers. Since then there had come nothing from the staunch little general, who also had remained in her tent, not ill, but permanently aloof and unreconciled. Very different, as it chanced, was the note struck by papa, who had come twice a day, and sometimes thrice, to the sick-room, ostentatiously cheery in his manner, but obviously depressed underneath by the dreary atmosphere enveloping the house. Never, it seemed, had papa been tenderer or more affectionate than in these bedside visits: so that Cally, with her sense of a guilty secret, could hardly bear to look at his kind, worried face.

And she had opened her eyes on the day of wellness with the knowledge that she must put her hand to this cloud now, though she brought down the skies with it. Nothing, it was clear, could be worse than this. To-night, after dinner, she must follow her father into the study, say what she must say. Her mind had returned and clung to the solid arguments of Hen and others. She knew that the memory of the bunching-room had got upon her nerves; entwined and darkened itself with other painful things; assumed

fantastic and horrid shapes. Perhaps the dreaded interview would not be so very bad, after all. Surely her father could not wear that kind look for nothing....

Page 153

Dressed, Carlisle stood at her window a moment, greeting somewhat sadly the brilliant day. Her desire was to stop the footless workings of her mind; to go out and do something. But all that she could think of to do was to return to Baird & Himmel's emporium and complete that shopping for the Thompson kinsfolk which had been so suddenly interrupted last week. And, that occupation exhausted, she would go on to Mattie Allen's, and probably stay there for luncheon. Tame achievements, but better than staying longer in this room.

Here on the broad window ledge, behind the concealing curtain, there stood a bowl of flowers. They were violets, dry and discolored now. The girl's eyes, just as she was turning away toward her mother, fell upon them, and she stopped, overtaken by memory. These were Hugo's flowers, his last gift to her. She herself had placed them here, that eventful afternoon five days ago, and not thought of them again till this moment.... Was that, which seemed like an echo from some previous life, only five days ago?

She stood looking down at the mass of sere bloom, touched the withered tops lingeringly with her finger-tips. It was her tribute to the dead, no more. The departed knight had dropped backward out of her heart with a speed and smoothness which showed that he had, indeed, had small foothold there since May. Less and less had Cally felt any impulse to judge or blame Hugo, impute "badness" to him; it was she who had changed, and never he. But how, why?... 'Was it something done, something said?' Strange to remember now the hurried journey to the Beach last year, that afternoon in Willie Kerr's apartment....

"Throw out those flowers in the window, Flora.... They've been faded for days."

She went down the stairs in that inner state which her country had once found unendurable: she was half slave and half free. And on the stairs she forgot Hugo entirely. She was thinking, in her loneliness and depression, of Vivian, who had pledged his help to her; wondering if she could ask him to come and give her his help now,—at four o'clock this afternoon, perhaps, when the house would be quiet and her mother napping. Her wish was to talk with him, to show him all her difficulty, before she saw her father. She felt that she could tell anything to Mr. V.V. now....

Cally tapped respectfully upon a closed door, and said "Mamma?" Bidden to enter by the strong voice within, she braced herself a little, and opened the door....

Mrs. Heth sat toward the bay-window of a spacious bedroom, dignified by an alcove and bright but for the half-drawn shades. It was observed that she wore her second-best robe de chambre, and was otherwise not dressed for the inspection of the best people. So indifferently was her fine hair caught up atop her head that the round purplish spot on her temple was left plainly visible: always an ominous sign....

“Good morning, mamma. I hope you’re feeling better to-day?”

Page 154

“Physically, I am quite well,” said her mother, only half turning her head.

“Oh, I’m glad.... It’s such a beautiful day. I hoped you would feel like going out for a drive.”

“I hardly feel like going out—as yet.... Sit down.”

Cally sat in the chair prescribed by a gesture. The eyes of the two women met for the first time since they had parted in tears. And Cally, seeing her mother’s bereaved face, had to crush down a sudden almost overpowering impulse toward explanation, reconciliation at any cost. However, she did crush it down. There was nothing to explain, as mamma had pointed out in the midnight.

Mrs. Heth cleared her throat, though her voice seemed sufficiently strong.

“I understood from Flora that you were getting up this morning,” said she, “so this seemed the appropriate time for me to see you, and learn something about your plans, regarding your future.”

“My plans?”

“As you have so completely overthrown your parents’ plans for you, I can only assume that you have others of your own.”

Cally sat with her hands folded in her lap. A look of curious wistfulness flitted across her face.

“No, I haven’t any special plans.”

“I’m surprised to hear you say so. You surely do not expect to go on this way the rest of your natural life, do you?”

“I don’t understand, mamma. Go on in what way?”

“In this way. In occupying the central position in my home, in allowing your parents to sacrifice their lives to you, in receiving lavish evidences of regard and affection which you evidently have not the slightest wish to return.”

There was a considerable silence.

“I have a sort of plan there,” said the girl, slowly. “I don’t want you—and papa—to go on—giving me everything. I want,” she said, with a slight tremor, “to take—to be just as little expense as I can after this.”

“Oh!... Then what you want to do is to withdraw altogether from society—and go to work to earn your own living?”

Carlisle raised her eyes. “Is that what you want me to do, mamma?”

“It is not a question of what *I* want in this house any longer, it seems.... I am pointing out to you, Carlisle, that the independence of action you have lately taken upon yourself is a serious matter, to be looked at from more than one side. It is not becoming,” said Mrs. Heth, watching her daughter’s face closely, “to bite the hand that feeds you.”

To this the girl had no reply. Beneath her mother’s somewhat vivid metaphor, she perceived a truth, and that truth the tragic weakness of her position. But she did not know now that large books had been written about this weakness, and many more would be....

Mrs. Heth having allowed the silence to continue a moment, educationally, drew a handkerchief across her upper lip, with its strange little downy mustache, and resumed:

Page 155

“With no plans of your own, you have lately thrown away the best opportunity you will ever have in your life. Now there are only two theories on which I can explain this conduct—so totally unlike your usual good sense. One is that you have permitted yourself, without my knowledge, to become interested in somebody else.... Have you?”

“No—oh, no!... No, of course not.”

“That I felt confident of,” said mamma, though not without a certain note of relief. “Confident.... Yet—to touch the second point,—as you look toward the future, you do expect to marry some day, do you not?”

The daughter seemed restive under this cross-examination. She turned away from the maternal scrutiny, and, resting her arm upon her chair-back, looked toward the shaded window.

“Yes—I suppose so.... That seems to be all I’m fit for.... But—since you ask me, mamma—I *would* like, in the meantime, not to be so ... so plainly labelled *waiting*.... I’d like,” she said, hesitatingly, “to have *one* man I meet—see me in some other light than as a candidate for matrimony.”

“That,” said Mrs. Heth, firmly, “will never be, so long as you retain your youth and beauty, and men retain their nature....

“And why should you wish it otherwise?” continued the dominant little lady. “Despite all the loose, unwomanly talk in the air, you do realize, I see, that marriage will always remain the noblest possible career for a woman.”

Cally remembered a converse of this proposition she had heard one day at the Woman’s Club. She answered with light bitterness:

“When I said just now that I was fit for marriage, I meant marriage, mamma—a wedding. Of course, I’m not fit to be anybody’s wife....” She paused, and added in a voice from which the bitterness had all gone out: “I’m not fit to be anybody’s mother.”

“There, there!” riposted mamma, briskly. “I think that’s enough of poor Henrietta Cooney, and her wild, unsuccessful notions.”

There was another brief silence; the silence of the death of talk.

“You’re in a dangerously unsettled state of mind, my daughter—dangerously. But you will find, as other women have found, that marriage will relieve all these discontents. I myself,” said mamma, with a considerable stretching of the truth, “went through the same stages in my youth—though, of course, I was married much younger than you.... Now, Carlisle, I have refused to believe that your quarrel with Hugo is irreparable.”

Carlisle started as if slapped. Had mamma jerked her by a string, she could not have turned more sharply. The little general, leaning forward, swept on with hurried firmness.

“I see, of course, that you have taken your quarrel very seriously, very hard. You feel that in your anger you both said terrible things which can’t possibly be overlooked. But, my child, remember that the course of true love never did run smooth. There have been few engagements which weren’t broken off at least once, few marriages when the wife didn’t make up her mind—”

Page 156

“Mamma!” said Cally, rousing herself as from a cataleptic sleep. “You can’t have understood what I told you that night. This was not a quarrel at all, in any sense—”

“I know! I understand! I withdraw the word cheerfully,” said mamma, in just that tone and manner which made the strange similarity between her and Hugo. “But what I want to say, Cally, is this. Hugo is still in Washington. Willie Kerr, to whom I talked by telephone last night, had a telegram from him yesterday. Now, my child, men do not take women’s angry speeches quite as seriously as you think. Hugo is mad about you. All he wants is *you*—”

“Oh, please—*please*! Don’t say any more. You don’t—”

“No, hear me out! See for yourself if my plan is not diplomatic and feasible, and involves no surrender of pride. I shall send Willie Kerr on to Washington this afternoon. He will go ostensibly on private business with one of the Departments,—though I will, of course, pay all expenses,—and putting up at Hugo’s hotel, will meet him as if by accident. In their talk Willie, who is tact and loyalty itself, will perhaps mention your sickness, though without comment. Gradually the impression will come to Hugo that if he returns, with, of course, suitable apologies—”

“Mamma,” said Cally, starting up, very white, “if you do any such thing as that I’ll go away somewhere. I *will* go and earn my own living.... I’ll go *and live with the Cooneys*!”

The two women gazed at each other. Over the mother’s face there spread a slow flush; the round, purple birthmark darkened. Cally spoke again, with deadly earnestness.

“I *did* think you understood about this.... If you persuade Hugo to walk down from Washington on his knees.... I’ll not see him.”

Mrs. Heth, curiously, had been brought down in full flight: perhaps by the force of that wild upstarting, perhaps by the grisly threat about the Cooneys. Carlisle in a flare-up had always required a certain handling. The worst of the mad girl was that she was really capable of doing these unspeakable things she mentioned.

“So you refuse pointblank,” said Mrs. Heth, in a muffled sort of voice, “to carry out your parents’ wishes.”

“About this—I *must*. I’ll do anything else you want me to, anything.... And, mamma, this isn’t papa’s wish,” said the girl, with some emotion. “He told me—the other night—that I mustn’t think of marrying anybody I didn’t care for. He said he had never thought the same of Hugo—”

Then mamma smote the flat arm of her morris-chair, and sprang up, exploding.

"*That's it*! Shove it off on your poor, generous father!... How characteristic of your whole behavior! Why, you ought to be *ashamed* to mention your father's name!" cried mamma; and, indeed, Cally was, though for reasons not known to her mother....

Mrs. Heth walked the floor, in the grip of those agonies which the defeat of her will brought her in poignant measure. It may be that her faith in her diplomatic plan had never been triumphantly strong. Now, certainly, her purposes were punitive only, and her flowing sentences well turned to her desire....

Page 157

“You suppose your father’s overjoyed to have his delightfully *independent* daughter thrown back on his hands—of course!” she was remarking. “True, you’ve heard him say a thousand times that he was going to sell his business as soon as you married and buy himself a place in the country and begin to have some pleasure of his own. But, of course, that was only his little joke! Yes, yes!” said mamma, brandishing her arms. “What he really wants is to go on slaving and toiling and worrying his heart out to keep you in pampered idleness and luxury, indulging your lightest whim without regard—”

“Mamma, mamma!—do, please!” the girl broke in. “If papa has been working so hard on my account—and I didn’t know that—then I don’t want him to do it any more. I wish he would sell—”

“Oh, I’ve no patience with your deathbed repentances! Don’t you know your father’s involved in serious worries at this moment, entirely on your account? Do you think a few dramatic speeches from you can undo—”

“Worries on my account? No, I didn’t know of any.... What worries?”

Cally had stood listening with a kind of numbed listlessness, ready to go at the first opportunity, now that the real purpose of the interview was discharged. But suddenly she perceived a new pointedness in her mother’s biting summaries; and she turned, with a slightly startled look in her eyes.

Her mother returned the gaze with savage sarcasm.

“Oh! You never heard of the Labor Commissioner and his hired character-assassin, I suppose! Never—”

“Yes, but I didn’t know any of that was on my account.”

“No, no, indeed! You thought it was just a little whim of your father’s to keep his factory in a condition that’s been a scandal in the community. Fighting off legislation—bribing inspectors—just his little bits of eccentric self-indulgence. You thought that ten thousand dollars I gave to the Settlement grew on a tree, I suppose. You—”

“Mamma,” said Cally, in a strained voice, “what on earth are you talking about? I want to understand. What did that money you gave to the Settlement have to do—”

“Don’t you *know* he needed it for his business?” cried mamma, advancing menacingly. “I tell you he’d put it by to spend it on the Works this fall, and stop these attacks on him. And why did I have to take it from him, but on *your* account, miss?—to try to clear the family name from the scandal you brought upon us—”

“*What*?”

“A scandal,” continued mamma, in a crescendo sweep, “that all but undid my lifework for the family’s position, and that may yet cost your father his presidency at the bank.”

The good lady easily saw that she had struck the right punitive note at last. Indeed, the question now, Cally’s peculiarities being considered, was whether she had not struck it rather too hard. The girl’s face had suddenly become the color of paper. The intense concentration of her gaze was painful in its way, slightly disconcerting to mamma.

Page 158

“Do you mean,” said Cally, in quite a shaky voice—“do you say that papa—meant to improve the Works *this fall*—and that you—that I—”

“I mean exactly what I say,” said Mrs. Heth, resolutely. “And I say it’s high time you were beginning to understand your position in this family, as a guide to your strange behavior. Do you suppose your father enjoys being under attack all the time? Haven’t you heard him say a hundred times, that it was bad business to let things go at the Works? Where were you six years ago when he said we’d have to economize and put up a new building, and I prevented him for your sake, arguing that you were just coming out and were entitled to—”

“*Six years*!... Why ... why, then I’m responsible for it *all*!... Why—*I’ve been on his back all the time*!”

“I’m glad you realize it at last.... Oh, well!” said her mother, throwing out both hands and speaking with a kind of gruff tolerance,—“there’s no use to *cry* about it.”

“I’m not crying,” said Cally.

She was, indeed, not crying as her mother had usually seen her cry; not with storm and racking. Nevertheless, two indubitable drops suddenly glittered upon the gay lashes, and now fell silently as Cally spoke.

“But I could cry,” said she, “I’m so happy ... I’m so glad, to know it’s all been my fault.... You don’t know ... I went to the Works the other day—”

“Oh, you did!” said her mother, bitterly, but enlightened a little. “And have been criticizing your father, I suppose, the father who has sacrificed—”

“He’ll forgive me.... He *must*. I’ll find a way.”

Mrs. Heth, flinging herself down in her chair again, said in a voice full of sudden depression: “I should say you owed him apologies, for that among other things.... Well, I give you up.”

Cally stood unmoving, slim hands locked behind her head, staring toward the window. Gone was the albatross from her young neck, melted the cloud from the azure round. Wisdom had come with such startling unexpectedness that she could not take in all that had happened to her just now. But all that mattered was as plain and bright as the sunshine waiting for her out there. She, and not papa whom she had so wronged in her thoughts, had made the bunching-room what it was; she, and nobody else, should make it better after this. And through the splendid confusion of sensations that, mounting within, seemed to float her away from this solid floor, she heard one clear voice sounding ever louder and louder. It was the voice of the prodigal, chastened and penitent: *"I will arise and go to my father."*

Cally turned toward the door.

Her mother, stirring from her heavy rebuking apathy, said: “Oh, there’s no use bothering him now to say you’re sorry. You’ve not thought of him all these years ...”

“That’s why I can’t wait—now,” said Cally. “And besides, there’s something else I want to speak to him about.... A—a business matter.”

Page 159

Mamma demanded an explanation. And Cally, pausing briefly at the door, turned upon that censorious gaze a face radiant as the morning.

“I’m going to give him my fifty thousand dollars to build a new Works with.... Won’t you please help me make him take it?”

But what her mother may have replied to this request failed to overtake Cally, flying down the hall to the telephone....

* * * * *

The bedroom conference, it was seen, had not been wholly fruitless, after all. Mrs. Heth’s last stand for Hugo—like Hugo’s last afternoon—had taken a slant not anticipated by her, but at least wholesome and moral in its effects. Cally’s dreaded accusing interview in the study gave place, beyond all imagining, to an unpremeditated outpouring by telephone, in which her chief fear was only of making a perfect little silly of herself. And lastly, Mr. Heth, called summarily from a directors’ meeting at the Fourth National Bank, was overflowed with such a wave of feminine incoherence and emotionalism as he found great difficulty in associating with his usually self-contained little daughter....

Papa indeed, knowing nothing of any conference or of any dark cloud either, was treated to the astonishment of his life. When he finally understood that the house was not in flames, or his wife stricken with a deadly malady, when he began to get some notion of what all the strange pother was about, his replies, for the most part, took the following general directions: (1) that little Callipers was out of her mind with her sickness, didn’t know what she was talking about, crazy, and the greatest little goose that ever was; (2) that she had no business ever going to the Works, but that was all right now, and he didn’t want to hear another word about it; (3) that he couldn’t stop to talk such foolishness in business hours, and she’d better go and lie down and rest and get her senses back; (4) that he gave her that money for herself, and when he got dependent on his little daughter, he’d let her know; (5) and that there, there, not to bother him now, we’d see, after lunch....

Sufficiently vague replies these; yet they seemed to leave the daughter in no doubt whatever that the matter which had all in a moment become dear to her heart was as good as settled. For when papa terminated the conversation by smartly ringing off, she immediately called another number: Jefferson 4127, this one was, which, as the book shows (only she did not look at the book) is the number assigned to Meeghan’s Grocery, down by the old Dabney House....

However the untutored voice at Meeghan’s reported that Doctor was out on his rounds and not to be reached before one o’clock. So Cally had to defer for a little while the

happiness she would have in telling the lame wanderer across her path that, after all, his eyes had not put their trust in her in vain.

Later she sat again on a revolving seat at Gentlemen's Furnishings, eagerly purchasing shirts, cost not exceeding one dollar each, for James Thompson, aged thirteen, of up-country. It happened to be her work to do in the world, and she was doing it.

Page 160

She was waited upon at the popular counter by Miss Whirtle herself, whom Cally remembered by figure if not by name; and she was so extremely agreeable and mollifying in her manner that the Saleslady's arrogance thawed away, and they were soon discussing questions of neck-sizes and sleeve-lengths in the friendliest intimacy. There were collars and neckties purchased, too,—these items Cally added on her own account, being in the vein of making presents to people to-day,—and here Miss Whirtle's taste was invaluable in assisting one to decide which were the nobby shapes and swell patterns and which the contrary. The robust one patted her transformation many times at Miss Heth, invited her at parting to call again; and later on—that night, it was—reported the whole conversation in detail in the Garland dining-room, imparting, we need not doubt, her own witty flavor to it all.

In Baird & Himmel's Cally met several other acquaintances, and finally Evey McVey, who was delighted to see her out again, but seemed to be examining her rather curiously, doubtless with reference to Hugo and what had happened in that quarter. Evey herself complained of being tired; so Cally drove her second-best friend to the McVey residence in the car, but pleaded duties at home against getting out for a little visit.

And then, bowling homeward in the brisk airs, she could return to her own thoughts again, which, as by the rubbing of an Aladdin's lamp, had suddenly become so happy and so absorbing. Later, she must think about mamma, and with what time and solaces she could close that breach. But in these hours her thought was all for her father, whom she seemed just to be beginning to understand for the first time in her life....

Now all the imaginative dreads and nightmare terrors were faded away, and she felt beneath her feet the solid sanity of Hugo's self. She had seen the Works on an exceptionally bad day; she had gone there, overdrawn and ignorant, looking for horrors; what she had actually seen and felt had been mysteriously intensified a hundredfold by her violent encounter with Colonel Dalhousie. For all that she knew, to this very moment, the Works might be, indeed (as the beautifully tactful girl Corinne had said), the best place to work in town.

But what Cally was thinking now was that, in sitting in judgment on her father, she had blindly judged him as if he were a free man—she, of all people, who had felt so poignantly the imprisoning powers of a groove. Now it appeared, as by a sudden light upon him, that papa had always been clamped fast in a groove of his own, exactly as she had been; a groove fixed for him by his place in society, by the way other men ran their cheroot factories,—for, of course, papa must do as his competitors did, or be crowded out, and the hardest-driving, meanest man set the pace for the kind ones, like papa,—and last and chiefly by the extravagances of a wife and daughter who always cried "give, give," and didn't care at all where the gifts came from. How could papa possibly be free with two costly women on his back all the time?... Strange that she

hadn’t grasped all this clearly, the minute she had recognized herself as a horse-leech’s daughter....

Page 161

Now the first thing to do, obviously, was to get off papa's back at once. Her fifty thousand dollars would be a sound starter there; of course papa would take it, since she wanted him to so much. And her mind, as she drove, kept recurring to this symbol, kept bringing up pictures of the new Works that would be, built perfect with her money. She saw it considerably like the beautiful marble palace of her childhood's thought, the pride of Canal Street without, and within wonderfully clean, spacious and airy, and most marvellously fragrant. In this new palace of labor, faints and swoons were things undreamed of. Trim, smiling, pretty girls, all looking rather like French maids in a play, happily plied their light agreeable tasks; and, in especial, the cheeks of poor Miller (who had stoutened gratifyingly) were observed to blossom like the rose.

Yet the creator of all these wonders was well aware that she was not giving her dowry to Miller, exactly....

Descending from the car at her own door, Cally encountered Mr. Pond, of the Settlement. The dark-faced Director was loafing, oddly enough, on Mrs. Mason's steps, which had once been Mr. Beirne's, four doors from home. He raised his hat about two inches at the sight of her, returned his watch and some typewritten papers to his pocket, and came forward.

"Don't run," said he, unsmiling. "I want to know plainly whether or not you are coming to my meeting to-morrow. Yes or no."

Cally laughed gaily. There was a radiance within her, and she liked this man increasingly. Several times they had met, since their antagonistic talk at the Settlement; and in the blunt Director's manner she had lately observed that creeping change which she had witnessed in men as stalwart, before now....

"Don't look so fierce," said she, "for I'll not be bullied. Or at least not till you explain why you're hanging around in front of the neighbors' at twelve o'clock in the morning—you who always pretend to be so frightfully busy."

"Waiting for Vivian. And I am busy, confound him.... Not too busy, as you see, to take a kind interest in your welfare—"

"Oh!... Is Dr. Vivian *there*—at the Masons'? Why, what are *you* waiting for him for?"

"Seems to me you ask a good many questions for an idler."

He stood on the sidewalk, looking up at her with his hawk-eyes, a man yet in the early thirties, but of obvious power.

"We're going to buy second-hand benches, if you must know," continued he. "He says he can show me where to get 'em cheap. Anything else?"

“No-o—except ... How much will the benches cost? Perhaps I—might be able to contribute something—”

“I don’t want your old money,” said Pond. “When are you going to be serious about serious things?”

“I think now,” said Cally ... “Only, you see, I don’t know anything at all.”

“I’ll teach you,” said the Director.

Page 162

Cally, standing on the broad white slab before her own door, did not answer. Her glance had turned down the street: and at this moment there emerged from the Masons' door the tall figure of V. Vivian, the article-writer, who would never have to put anything in the papers about papa now. He saw her instantly, and over his somehow strange and old-fashioned face there broke a beautiful smile. He lifted his hat high, and, so holding it at height, posed as if for a picture, gave it something like a wave, as in double measure of greeting and good-will. A proper salutation from friend to friend; and the sunlight gleamed on his crisp fair hair....

Cally's return greeting was somewhat less finished. She gave the lame doctor one look of brilliant sweetness; and then she said to him, "Oh, how do you do?"—in a voice that he could not possibly have heard. Next she said, "Yes, I'll be at the meeting to-morrow," with her back turned squarely toward Mr. Pond. And then she opened her door and went in quite quickly, leaving the Director staring intently at a crack in the sidewalk....

Within, Cally perceived that she had acted rather unreasonably, missing the opportunity to tell Mr. V.V. that she desired to speak with him: but that, of course, was only because she had not wanted to interrupt and detain two busy men at their labors. The oversight, besides, was easily to be remedied; though she did not again send the clear call for Meeghan's. She decided to write a brief note instead, and did, asking her friend if he could come and give her his help about a matter—say at four o'clock that afternoon. The note was dispatched, not by old Moses this time, but by the hand of an urchin in a blue uniform, who was deep in "Lady Helen, the Fair Ghoul," as he bicycled, but apparently reached his destination in due course.

And V. Vivian, once again, was not disobedient to the heavenly summons.

XXXII

Time's Jests, and now the Perfect Apology, to stand a
Lifetime in Brick and Stone; concluding with a Little Scene,
which she will remember while she lives.

She had called him untruthful once for speaking the truth about the Works. Now she would make her apology due, to stand a lifetime in brick and stone. This Cally did for the man of the slums to-day; and this she meant him to understand without much speech, since speech, in the circumstances, would be somewhat difficult.

But then, of course, she could know nothing of those colloquies Mr. V.V. had had in his time with O'Neill, the hard-joking Commissioner, of inner conflicts he had had of late all by himself. Nor did she even take it in how far her advancing thought of him, and of all this subject, had outrun anything she had ever put into word or deed before. So she was far from imagining what a miracle she made for him this afternoon, like a midsummer dream come true; far from guessing how he, with his strange

unconsciousnesses, would think of it all as just a beautiful but detached happening, a glorious coincidence....

Page 163

He wore for this meeting, not his holiday raiment of blue, with the sprigged waistcoat that his Uncle Armistead might have left him, but that selfsame suit she had seen upon him all last year; including that other memorable day in her life when she had come clicking down the stairs to find the tall outlander standing here in her familiar background. Only there was no feeling in her now that he was an alien in the Heth drawing-room. No, here V. Vivian seemed to belong to-day, the best and worthiest thing in the room.

To her, that was; but it was not so with others. The one speck in the perfect balm was that, to have this man here at all, she had had to manage it secretly, as if it were something discreditable....

The greetings were over; they were seated; he was advised that it was about a building matter that she desired his help; and even when, as talk progressed, she placed her building lot for him at Seventeenth and Canal Streets, the doctor's manner, which was quite eager and interested and pleased at being summoned for help, showed no signs of understanding.

"Seventeenth and Canal Streets," he repeated, alert and businesslike. "Yes? It's to be a business building, then?"

"There's a building there now, but I'm going to pull that one down," said Cally. "I don't like it."

And at this moment it was that she saw consciousness burst into the unconscious; burst with the strong suddenness of an explosion.

"*Seventeenth and Canal Streets*!... That's the Heth Works corner!"

"That's the building I'm going to pull down. I—I've taken a dislike to it."

The tall young man came to his feet, slowly, as if hoisted from above by an invisible block and tackle. All in a moment, his face had become quite pale.

"What do you mean?" he asked, in a queer clipped voice.

"I mean ... I don't think you will have to say anything about my father in your articles.... We're going to build a new Works—*now*!"

He stood staring a second like a man of stone; and then turned abruptly from her and walked away. But in that second she saw that his petrifaction was already scattering, and his face wore the strangest look, like a kind of glory....

So Cally thought that he understood now; and that was all the reward she wanted. Sitting silent, she looked after his retreating back. She perceived, with a queer little

twitching in her heart, that the polished spaces upon Mr. V.V.'s right elbow had thinned away into an unmistakable darning. And then it came over her quite suddenly that the reason he wore this suit to-day was probably that he had given his blue suit away, to one of his sick. She seemed quite sure that that was it. And oh, how like him, and like nobody else in the world, to give away his best one, and keep the patches for himself....

And the first thing that he said, returning to her after his thunderbolt surprise, seemed also beautifully characteristic of his strange faiths.

Page 164

“Well, it’s wonderful,” said he, in quite a natural voice. “Of course, the greatest thing that will ever happen to me.... And yet—it may seem strange to you—but I’ve felt all along—I’ve *felt*—that something like this might probably happen any time.”

Moved as she was, Cally could have smiled at that. But when she saw the intense honesty of his face, which still wore that half-startled yet shining look, the look of a man with a sudden secret all his own, she did not smile, and her own thought was given quite a new course.

“Perhaps you’re a nice sort of mind-reader,” said she, gently, “for you were right to feel that way, at least as far as my father is concerned. I specially wanted you to know about that. Papa has been planning for six years to put up a new building—only last month he had arranged to spend quite a lot of money in repairs. I just came to understand all this to-day. The trouble has been,” said Cally, looking up at the old family enemy with no sense of hesitation or reluctance—“I’ve always been too expensive, you see. I’ve never left him any money to carry out his plans....”

She would not say anything about horse-leech’s daughters, not, of all things, wanting to embarrass him to-day. But possibly his mind filled in a hiatus here, and there was no mistaking that what she said about her father impressed him profoundly.

“I ... I really seem to have known. You might call it a sort of—of premonition—if you wanted to ... Though you’ll naturally not think I’ve acted that way.”

Mr. V.V. stood by a spindly table, carefully examining a small but costly vase, the property of Mr. Heth, of the Cheroot Works; and now he went on with a kind of diffident resolution, the air of one who gives a confidence with difficulty, but must do so now, for his honor.

“You may remember my telling you once that I was—was sorry to write the factory articles you just mentioned. The truth is I’ve hated to write them—especially as to—as to the Works.... It’s just the sort of thing I’ve wanted for a long time to write, too. I had the argument thought out down to the bone. Oh, they’re good.... I—I was going to send the first lot to the ‘Chronicle’ this week.... And yet—well, it’s been pulling against the grain somehow, every line of the way. It seemed strange.... And now I see that I must have felt—known—all along.... But,” said the strange young man, setting down the vase and hurriedly running his fingers through his hair, “I—I realize that this must sound most unconvincing to you. Probably foolish. No matter....”

But Cally felt by now that she understood him better than he understood himself.

“No, I think I understand,” said she. “And if you hadn’t felt that way—don’t you see?—it never would have happened.”

He turned on her another strange look, at once intensely interested and intensely bewildered. But she glanced away from it at once, and would give him no chance to ask her what that might mean.

Page 165

“I’ve got so much I want to tell you, so much I want to ask your advice and help about,” said she, rising, with a change to what she regarded as an excellent business voice and manner. “Perhaps we ought to go into executive session at once—and let’s go into the library, too! I know you’re awfully busy, but I do hope you’ve come prepared to make a good long visit.”

The article-writer neglected to reply at all, moving after her with his queer, startled look....

So these two passed from the Heth drawing-room to the Heth library, to talk about business: the new Heth Works, in fine. They came into a room which was intimately and poignantly associated with Hugo Canning. Memories of the departed greeted Cally upon the threshold, and thereafter; only they were not poignant now. Hugo’s face kept rising mistily beside the so different visage of the man he had instinctively disliked, his ancient hoodoo....

This was to be a meeting like none other Cally had ever had with the stranger in her house, a *happy* meeting, troubled by no shadow. They sat down across the great table from each other, in good business style, as she considered; and then she began to talk eagerly, recounting to him without any embarrassment, though of course with some judicious expurgation, what had been going on in her mind, and out of it, during the last five days; beginning with the afternoon she had seen him at the Cooneys’, and culminating with the long talk she had had with her father at, and after, luncheon to-day.

And he, the only confidant she had ever had, sitting with his patched elbow on her father’s table, and his chin in his cupped hand, attended every word with his singular quality of interest. He was unique among all the people she had known, in that the things he seemed to care most about were never things for himself at all....

“So that’s how it stands now,” said Cally, presently. “My father was naturally surprised at first, as I’ve never shown any interest in his work before, and of course he said he wouldn’t do it,—wouldn’t take my money, I mean, though it’s really his all the time. But at last I did get him to talking about it seriously, and then he grew more and more interested.... Oh, I know he’s going to do it! I *know* it!—That’s all settled! And I do think he’ll let me have a hand in really planning it—that is, if I can show him that I—I know anything about it.... Well, of course I *don’t*, you see—nothing, nothing!—and that’s where my problem begins. I’ve got to learn everything, from the very start, and do it quickly.... Do you think I possibly can?—”

“*Books*!” he cried, throwing out both hands. “What’re they for but to teach us everything, *right away*?...”

In fact, her problem there was really no problem at all, it seemed. Pond himself had at hand a fine little general library on all these subjects; there was the State Library; there

were the bookstores of the world: all waiting for her, all packed with meaty information. Perhaps, just as a starter, she would let him make out a sort of preliminary check-list to-night, out of catalogues, out of some bully advertisements in the backs of Pond's works....

Page 166

“Oh, you *are* nice!” exclaimed Cally. “You can’t guess what it means to be encouraged!... I do so want to go into it seriously.”

He talked further, indicating the procedure: first her own idea of what she wanted; then an architect to sketch some plans; then a builder to figure after the architect. The thing began to shape up, rapidly, definitely. She found him an inspiriting soul....

“I ought to say,” she explained, quite excited, “that I mentioned fifty thousand dollars only because that was the sum I happened to have, in a lump. But we’re going to make it *good*, no matter what it costs. I have a little more money of my own,” said she, “about eight thousand dollars, and of course I’ll put that in, too. And I know my father will feel the same way.”

But no, V.V.’s belief was that the sum she mentioned would be far more than necessary. She could get a rough sort of estimate at once, if desired, given the dimensions of the lot and a general idea of the style of building she wanted. His friend, Jem Noonan, he who was just now starting out as a contractor, would be only too delighted to do some figuring on it.

“Of course the best way of all to gather ideas at the start,” said he, staring through her, “is to go to the Works—go often.... There’s no other such way of seeing what the actual needs are.”

“Yes ... Yes, of course that’s true,” said Cally.

But what she felt like saying was that she didn’t want to go to the Works at all, unless he could go with her.

“I want to get *your* ideas now, please,” she added—“everything you can think of. You can’t have any notion how ignorant I am.... But—oh, there’s one thing I wanted to speak to you about first. I suppose—even at the best—it would be some time before the new building could begin?”

Oh, a few months, no doubt, before all plans would be ready, and her father’s arrangements made to move.

“Do you think the floors in this old building are very *strong*? The man who was with me the day I went there didn’t seem to think so—and I didn’t either! And some very heavy-looking new machines were being put in the bunching-room, and I believe some more are going to be put in to-morrow.”

“Oh!... You mean you think they might overload the floor?”

“Don’t you?”

“Well—it’s possible,” admitted Mr. V.V., slowly, and one could see that he didn’t altogether like the idea of anybody’s criticizing Mr. Heth’s conduct of his business. “But—ah—really I don’t—”

“Couldn’t we fix it, in some simple way—brace up the floor somehow?”

“Oh, yes. You’d have no trouble in fixing it.... Far as that goes.”

“Don’t you think you could manage to say *we* once?”

“Oh!” said Mr. V.V., pleased. “I could that!... I didn’t know, you see, how far you cared to let me in.”

Cally smiled at him over the library table.

Page 167

“Hasn’t it occurred to you that you are in it, that you’ve been right in the middle of it all along?”

He gave her one of his original looks, and said: “Well, I can’t say it had.... But it’s where I’d rather be than anywhere else in the world.”

“You can make nice speeches, at any rate.... Do you know you’re the strangest man, I believe, that ever lived?”

“No, that’s news. Am I?... Well, in what way am I so strange?”

“Oh, it’s a long, long story. But I’m going to tell it all to you some day.... Do go on and help me about the floors. Papa won’t. He didn’t seem to like my speaking about them at all. He says they’d hold hundreds more machines if he only had the room—”

“Well, he *knows*.... He’s—he’s had the strain figured out. Of course.”

So had Time, the master-humorist, reversed positions between Heths and Vivians. The old Arraigner, for his part, seemed to feel now that, to all intents and purposes, papa *had* put up the building six years ago....

But Cally explained how floors and machines had got upon her nerves. This was, she said, *our* first point to settle. And thereupon the young man at once addressed himself to the question of remedies; sketching with his finger on the table-top, till she got note-paper and pencils from mamma’s desk in the corner, switched light into a reading-lamp, and came and sat down beside him. On the paper V.V. obligingly produced an outline of the three floors of the present factory, accurately locating stairway and elevator shaft; even the point where the cloak-room was to be knocked out to give the space needed for the new machines....

“How in the world do you know so much about the Works?”

“Oh—well, you see, the shipping clerk there is quite a friend of mine,” said V.V. “A very nice fellow, sort of a Lithuanian, named Dolak. Don’t be offended, but I—I’ve been down there once or twice at night.”

However, he seemed stumped as to the best method of support, admitting that it was not so simple as it seemed. And presently, when he had tried and condemned columns from floor to floor, the girl said, hesitatingly:

“Dr. Vivian, do you think props—outside—would do any good?”

He turned his intent gaze upon her; he was frowning absorbedly and looking rather doubtful about it all.

“I mean iron braces running from the ground on each side of the building,” said Cally—-“and holding up girders, or whatever you call them, under the bunching-room floor?”

He gazed a moment, and then exclaimed:

“Oh—good! *Oh, that’s good*!... That would do it—do it perfectly!...”

He proceeded with eagerness to sketch in her square-arch braces under his bunching-room floor, and he said again: “Perfect solution!... Why, you ought to have been a builder!”

“Oh, I—just happened to see a picture of something like that in the encyclopaedia this afternoon.”

Page 168

Her tone was depreciatory, not suggesting that she had looked some time before she happened to see that picture. But within she was feeling the strangest, the most exhilarating thrills.... Oh, the clearness of being a *fellow-worker*; of praise that had nothing to do with a candidacy for matrimony!...

“But the difficulty,” she said, “is to persuade papa to let me do it. Of course, I’ve no right to expect him to take me seriously.... I know *you* could persuade him.”

That, spoken impulsively, she hurriedly covered up in conversation; begging him to go on at once and give her his ideas of what the new building should be like. She had gathered by now, that, whatever he considered wonderful in all this, it was not the fact that he, she, and her father should be, so to say, planning it shoulder to shoulder. But this fine unconsciousness of his she herself could not match; not at least till she had had more time to smooth things over with her father....

However, talk of mere temporary repairs in condemned old buildings was quickly swallowed in plannings for the splendid new. Here the man from the outskirts indubitably shone; he bristled with illuminating ideas. He, it seemed, was for a four-story building, brick, with concrete floors. Much he had to say on the subject of fire-escapes and patent-doors, lunch-rooms and rest-rooms with lockers, enclosed stairways and elevator shafts; shower-baths, too, if one simply must have the best and never mind the expense. And then his pencil began unconsciously to work as he went along; and presently there emerged upon a fresh sheet of mamma’s best note-paper the first visible presentment of the Works that would be. There it actually *was*, for you to gaze at, dream over; the perfect apology: the front and side elevation of a fine, dignified, businesslike building, plain yet undeniably handsome, very substantial and roomy, very full of airy windows. Not like a marble palace, after all; but a child could see that nobody was ever crowded in there, nobody ever the least faint. Nothing homicidal here, Mr. V.V., look where you will....

“You can *draw*, too!”

“Straight lines,” said V.V., modestly. But he regarded his handiwork with passionate approbation, and finished it off gallantly with a flag flying from the roof and two stately motor-trucks (so he said) wheeling by the door.

“Oh, how beautiful!” cried Cally Heth.

And it was all so curiously exciting to her, so intensely interesting. No prospect in her life, it seemed, had ever stirred her like this strange one; a new cigar-factory, born of her purse and heart....

Once, about at this point, the young man threw out with mysterious delight:

“I’ll like to see old Sam O’Neill’s face, when he hears about this.”

In the midst of the animated talk came Annie, the parlormaid—and Cally started at the sound of the approaching feet, and hated herself for it—to say that Dr. Vivian was wanted at the telephone. The doctor seemed annoyed by the summons, though not surprised; he had had to take the liberty, he explained as he rose, of leaving word at his office where he could be found, in case of necessity—words of this sort being left, as we know, with his paid assistant, Mrs. Garland, the world’s biggest office-boy.

Page 169

So V. Vivian was led away by Annie to the downstairs telephone in the butler's pantry; whence he was back in a moment, looking relieved, and assuring Miss Heth that it was nothing in the least urgent or important. There was no hurry at all, it seemed. But Cally felt that the business talk was drawing to a close, with a good deal still left unsaid....

Returning with eager interest to his drawing, Mr. V.V. fell to planting shade-trees of the best quality all down the Seventeenth Street side of the new building. So engaged, he observed suddenly:

"Don't worry any more about those floors, please—will you? That's all going to work out very nicely.... I'll get a figure from Jem Noonan right away on that plan of yours. And I'll see that it's a low figure, too,—it's got to be low!... Good heavens!" said V.V., eyeing his drawing with a queer little introspective smile. "We can't be expected to spend anything much on a building that's going to come down in a couple of months, you know."

She looked, smiling a little, too, at his unconscious face, fine, to thinness, which had once made Mr. Pond think of a bishop who never grew up. And her look became suddenly full of tenderness....

"I don't worry," said Cally, "now that I've got you to help me."

The man from the Dabney House spoke again:

"I was just thinking, out there at the telephone, that if there's no further business before the house, you might feel like beginning that long story you—you spoke of just now."

That took her by surprise. She seemed to be less and less at her ease. But now surely had come her moment to take her courage in her hands, and render him his due.

"I believe I ought to," said she, lightly—"a chapter or two, at least. For I don't think you'll ever work it out for yourself.... And I'm glad you're that way."

He made no reply, going on carefully with his arbor-day practice.

"When you said just now that this was wonderful," said Cally, beginning to lose the light touch already—"you meant that it was a wonderful happening, didn't you? Your idea seems to be that all this just happened."

But no, Mr. V.V. denied that vigorously, and stated his logical theory: that her father had chanced to postpone his intentions, merely through the well-known fact that men get accustomed to conditions that they constantly see; but that she, going there with fresh eyes....

"I might have gone there a hundred times, but I'd never have thought of it as having anything to do with me—don't you know it?—if it hadn't been for you."

He looked at her briefly; and she saw that his look was as bewildered as a battle-ground.

“Oh!... Do you mean that you *are* doing it because of—to—to avoid the—that is, on account of the articles?”

“Oh, *not* the articles!—*no*! That’s just what I don’t mean. I’ve never thought of the articles! I don’t think of you that way at all....”

Page 170

She stopped precipitately, somehow divining that she was mysteriously wounding him. And then suddenly she understood that that *was* the way he thought of himself, exactly; that he, who unconsciously moved mountains by his gentleness, somehow saw himself only in the light of his “terrible” (but still unpublished) articles. It was as if he reckoned himself as either an article-writer, or nothing....

“Though it’s true,” said Cally, gently, with hardly any pause at all, “that through most of the time I’ve known you I’ve thought of you ... as a hard man ... terribly uncompromising.”

His, it was clear, was not a tongue that spoke easily about himself. He finished putting a flower-box into the window of the new Works, before he said:

“I hope we needn’t trouble now about anything at all that’s past.”

“That’s what I hope, too ... more than you could. And besides—I’ve always liked you best when you were gentle. And ... it’s because of what you’ve taught me—at those times—that I’m doing this to-day.”

Again he turned his singularly lucid gaze full upon her; and now his look was absolutely startled. Color was coming into his face. His short, crisp hair, which had been parted so neatly an hour ago, stood rumpled all over his head, not mitigating the general queerness of his appearance. And yet his mouth wore a smile, humorous and disparaging.

“May I ask what you consider that I’ve taught you?”

“Everything I know,” said Cally, lacing a pencil between her fingers.

“Why!... When we’ve never even had a real talk about it before!... I told you once that you were more generous than—”

“No, I’m never generous enough. That’s my trouble, among others.... But if you think that it’s a nice and happy thing for us to be putting up this building, I want you please always to remember ... that you’ve done it all yourself.”

There was a tense silence, out of which his voice spoke, no longer with any trace of humor.

“Don’t be polite.... I couldn’t quite stand it. Do you mean that?”

“It’s all a failure if you won’t believe that I do.”

“Then I do believe it.”

This time the silence ran somewhat longer, and again it was V.V.'s voice, greatly stirred, that broke it.

"I don't understand, but I do believe it.... And it makes me pretty proud. By George, pretty proud!... Why—I've talked a lot—but it's the first thing I've ever accomplished! *The first thing*...."

His voice showed that his mind had swept away from her, over spaces; and Cally raised her eyes and looked at him. He sat gazing wide-eyed into the dull-green glow of her lamp, on his face a curious and moving look; a look humbled yet exalted, gloriously wondering, and to her the wistfullest thing she had ever seen in her life. He, who had given away his patrimony, who was giving away his life every day with a will, thought that this was the first thing....

Page 171

All that was sweetest in the girl, all that was maternal and understanding, rose fiercely within her, stormed her with a desire to mother this man, to protect him from his own royal yet somehow infinitely sad self-denials. For this moment she felt far stronger than he. His hand, with the pencil in it, lay on the table close by her, and Cally closed her slim fingers over it with a firm clasp.

“Ah, don’t say that, Mr. V.V.—don’t look that way. It hurts me, in my heart.... Can’t I make you believe that you’ve accomplished more than anybody else in the world?...”

He did not move at the shock of her touch, at the sound of his little name upon these unaccustomed lips. She was aware only of a subtle contraction, a sort of tightening going on somewhere within him. So Cally finished her small speech with her hand over his. But at just that point, a stir seemed to shake through the man; he was seen to be turning his head; and in the same breath, her moment of high strength broke abruptly. The veins fluttered queerly in the forward hand; she felt a quick flush rising somewhere within, spreading and tingling upward into her face. So Cally rose hurriedly, her hand withdrawn, and moved away. But she did her best, for her pride’s sake, to envelop her movement with a matter-of-fact air; and when she had got about four steps away from him, she remarked, quite distinctly:

“Don’t get up.... I ... want to get something.”

And she did, in fact, go on to mamma’s desk and attentively select three more sheets of note-paper, which would no doubt come in handy for something or other some day.

And out of the stillness behind her came Mr. V.V.’s voice, just a little husky now:

“No one ever did anything so sweet to me before.”

But that only made things worse, turning a white light, as it were, on thoughts she had had before now of the loneliness of his life. So she, finding herself not strong enough to be a comforter after all, said in a resolute kind of way:

“I never like to hear my friends depreciated. So please don’t do it any more.... What was the name of that book about factories—the one you said that Mr. Pond had?”

Silence behind her, and then: “‘The New Factory Idea,’ by T.B. Halton.”

She noted this information carefully on one of her sheets of paper, thus proving that she was right to go and get them, all the time.

“I thought,” said she, “I might see if Saltman had it. Then I could begin to cram to-night.”

But no, he said that Saltman hadn't it, but would order it, of course. And then the scraping of a chair-leg advised all listeners that Mr. V.V. was violating that injunction laid upon him as to not getting up....

He advanced round the table-end, his hand raised in his nervous and characteristic gesture. So anyone who wished could see that deficiency at his elbow, about which he himself seemed so splendidly indifferent. He was as tall as Hugo; but Hugo, with his lordly good looks and beautiful clothes, was certainly a much more eye-catching figure. And yet, as she straightened now and looked, the knowledge shot suddenly through Cally that this doctor in his patches somehow looked, that he had always looked, rather the finer gentleman of the two....

Page 172

“Johnson’s the publisher,” said V.V., coming to a halt in front of her. And then, taking the sheets of note-paper unconsciously from her unresisting hands, he added, looking down:

“But—how’d you mean just now ... that I—I’ve accomplished so—so much?”

By now Cally could smile, in quite a natural-seeming way; and this she did, full under the prophetic gaze, revealing shining white teeth and glimpses of a rose-lined mouth. And if “he was a Hun, she had always been the loveliest of them, God wot....

“I’m beginning to believe,” said she, “that you’re not such a very strange man, after....”

So she ended; her gaze shifting, the smile dying on her lip. For the door of the library had opened authoritatively, and that difficulty which had embarrassed her all through the afternoon suddenly confronted her upon the threshold.

Mr. Heth, of the Works, en route to his study, was briefly surprised by the little tableau he had stumbled upon. But seeing young men about the house at all hours wan no nine days’ wonder for him; and he came on in with quite his usual air.

“Ah, Cally! Didn’t know anybody was in here,” said papa; and he glanced from her, with amiable expectancy, toward the stranger. “What’s this confabulation about?”

Cally felt herself turning white. She steadied herself with one hand on the writing-leaf of the desk.

“We were talking about the new Works,” said she.... “Papa—I want to introduce a good friend of mine—Dr. Vivian.”

“Oh, Mr. Heth!... I’m so glad to know you, sir.”

Thus the fearless young voice at her side. But Cally was gazing, transfixed, at her father, on whose face the friendly greeting air was giving place to astonished displeasure, not untouched with indignation. He had stopped short in the middle of the floor, and the hand he had been automatically putting out fell dead at his side.

“Oh!—Ah!—Dr. Vivian!” said Mr. Heth, with the stiffest inclination. And then, his look going from one to the other of the two young people, he added, as if involuntarily: “*Vivian*?... Ah! I’d—have expected a different-looking man!”

The pause then, the suspense of all action from the world, was infinitesimal. But it seemed long to Cally. And she thought she could never forgive her father if he turned away, leaving this slight upon her friend.

“Papa,” she began, unsteadily, “I don’t think....”

But once again her sentence hung unended. V.V., advancing, came then into her line of vision; and Cally saw that he had no thought for the cover of her skirt. Her father's forbidding deportment had not escaped the young man; there were both a diffidence and a dignity in his bearing. And yet she saw that his face wore like a flower that guileless and confiding look he had, the look of a man who cannot doubt that, in their hearts, all mean as kindly as he himself. He moved upon her silent father as if singing aloud an immortal faith in the goodness of his fellows: *Though he slay me, yet will I trust him*....

Page 173

But what his audible voice was saying was very simple, and a little embarrassed:

“I’ve felt that I’ve just come to know you to-day, Mr. Heth ... to understand things better. I suppose it’s too much to hope that you can forget what’s past, all at once. But I’d be mortified to feel.... Ah, sir!—I’ve felt honored by your House to-day....”

That was all; the mists lifted. He saw no difficulties, and so there were none. Papa’s face was thawing back, through several surprised looks, to its natural kindliness; he had taken the offered hand, in the middle of the little speech; and then, within a minute, he was saying, quite amiably, that well, well, we’d say no more about it ... s’posed the thing to do was to let bygones be bygones....

And papa’s daughter, Cally, turned away quickly from that spectacle, winking furiously, and wondering when she had got to be such a baby....

* * * * *

[Illustration: PAPA—I WANT TO INTRODUCE A GOOD FRIEND OF MINE—DR. VIVIAN]

Strange things had been happening of late, it seemed; strange memories gathering for backward thought hereafter; novel pictures ranging in the immaterial storehouse that opens down the years. But in all Cally’s invisible collection, then or thenceforward, there was never a scene that she saw so vividly as this: herself standing silent by the newel-post in the wide hall; her father, distinct and genial in the light through the open door, observing to Mr. V.V. that hard words buttered no parsnips, as the fellow said; and V.V., half-smiling at her over papa’s broad shoulder, and saying to her with his eyes that of course this was the way it was meant to be, all along.

XXXIII

Her Last Day, in this History; how she wakes with a Wonder in her Heart, has her Banquet laid at the Board of the Cooneys, dreams back over the Long Strange Year; finally how she learns Something that not Everybody Knows: what it is like at the End of the World.

A morning in October, and she had waked to fare forth and capture, by hook or by crook, the most eligible parti who was ever likely to swim into her ken. Another morning in October, and all her waking horizon seemed filled by the knowledge that, at half-past four in the afternoon, she would meet and talk of cheroot factories with a man so little eligible that he trusted the crows to bring his raiment. In the wide world was there another person whose life’s pendulum, in a twelvemonth, had swung so wildly far?

Eight o'clock now, by the little clock on the mantel: eight hours and a half to Mr. Pond's meeting for workers at the old Dabney House. One needn't be an astronomer to calculate that. And Cally Heth lay wide-eyed in her great bed, and thought how strange, how wonderful is life....

Page 174

In the watches her mind had gone back and back over the long year; and she had marvelled at the tininess of turnings upon which, it was all clear now, great issues had hung. She could put her finger on time after time, last year and even this, when the smallest shifting in the course would have brought her, to-day, far otherwhere. 'Had she said that, had she done this'.... Was it all the wild caprice of Chance, then, that had no eyes? Were people so helpless, the slight sport of Luck, thistledown blowing in the winds of the gods? Ah, but she saw clearer than that. Had she not felt all along how powerfully this sequence of happening and encounter had pressed toward far other ends? And the divinity that had shaped them at last, acting and reacting and giving circumstance a soul, had been only that mysterious divinity that makes human beings what they are. There was truth in the saying that destiny is only character under its other name.

No chance here, surely, that had waked her so still and shining-eyed, such a wonder in her heart....

She had marked this day for diligent study. Last night an unknown hand had left at the door a hard-used copy of "The New Factory Idea," by T.B. Halton. And Cally, at the end of a second long business conference with her father, had read three chapters of the absorbing work, and slept upon the resolve to devote this morning to it altogether. But she had seen at the first look of the flooding sunshine upon the shutters, that she did not feel studious at all. Let books look to themselves to-day. Her desire was to be outdoors; to be alone, and to muse awhile. Surely nobody ever had so much, so much, to think about.

However, as a daughter one wasn't altogether free; nor yet again as a member of organized society. All day the claims of the familiar encroached upon the real world within, and thoughts, the radiant aliens, had to range themselves in as they could.

* * * * *

She was breakfasting with her father. They were to forage for luncheon to-day, these two, and spoke of it; he naming the club, she electing her cousins the Cooneys. And here was the token of the more cheerful atmosphere prevailing this morning in the house. Mrs. Heth was entertaining a lunch-party of seven ladies, her contemporaries, at two o'clock this day. True, the invitations had been issued before the crash: but the hopeful point, as even the servants were aware, was that they had not been recalled.

They were glad that mamma felt like seeing people again; and said so. And Cally then asked her father if he had any engagement for the evening.

Mr. Heth glanced at her over his "Post," and his glance feared that he saw yet another conference advancing upon him. Yet, it was fair to say, he had not been by any means inconvincible about the new Works. Real estate was real estate, say what you would;

and it might be that the violent shake-up in the family plans had made the immediate future of the business a somewhat concrete issue.

Page 175

He said, guardedly perhaps: "To-night?—let's see.... Well, not that I think of just now."

But Cally merely wanted to propose a table of bridge in the library, he and she against a third and fourth. And papa's changed expression said at once that that was a horse of another color.

"Well, that'd suit me.... Suit me first-rate."

Their evening was so arranged. She warned him gaily to be on his mettle; she would pick up two of the keenest players to be found. Papa, with gathering zest, admitted that practice was what he needed, most particularly as to the bids. Had a rubber at the club Saturday night, and Carmichael and those fellows took nine dollars from her old daddy....

"Let's make it a standing engagement, papa—one evening a week, the same table!... Oh, I'd love to!..."

This, too, seemed remarkably suited to her father's whim. A decidedly amiable-looking gentleman he was, with his fresh coloring, spotless waistcoat and fine blond mustaches; a home-loving man, not much used to having parties given for him.

And Cally regarded him with eyes which held new depths of affection. The last moment of the interview yesterday had brought an undreamed development, strangely endearing: her father, in the nicest way, had invited Dr. Vivian to call on him at the Works this afternoon and see the plant for himself. Part of this perfect consummation had been due, without doubt, to Vivian himself, a little, perhaps, to the direction she had artfully given the conversation; but she well knew that most of it had sprung spontaneously from the father-love which had never failed her yet....

"And, Cally, hunt up that book I saw kicking around here last year," said Mr. Heth, when he rose. "If we're going to do it at all, we might as well take the thing seriously, and get the bids straight."

"I'll find it, papa. We might read up a little before dinner. I'm awfully rusty."

And then her father stood by her chair, pinching her smooth cheek, looking down at her with an odd expression, half quizzical, half grave and speculative. So she had found him looking at her last night, as she sought to explain to him how different Dr. Vivian was from the articles he wrote, and hated....

"So I'm to be on my company manners with this young man, eh? Ask him won't he please be kind enough to teach an old man how to run his business, that it?"

"I didn't say that, papa dear.... I feel I haven't thanked you half enough for being so sweet to me ... about it all."

“Rather surprised at my sweetness myself.... Well,” said Mr. Heth, musing down at the apple of his eye. “There must be something a good deal out of the common about a boy who could get you so worked up about a factory, I’ll say that.... And he certainly looks a whole lot better’n he writes.”

He quoted something about an old dog’s new tricks, kissed her with tenderness, said, “Well, if we come to blows, I’ll ’phone you for help,” and went off humming an air.

Page 176

For Cally was not to be of the Works party this afternoon. It had stood as an ideal opportunity for the two men's better acquaintance; her presence, she had thought, might only mar it. Now, gazing after her father's departing back, she rather wished she had decided otherwise....

She searched and found So-and-So's "Auction Bridge." A time passed: and she was in the big bedroom, making her peace with mamma.

She had supposed the thing to do was simply to go on, as nearly as she could, as if nothing had happened. But when she saw her mother's face, marked as from an illness, she remembered nothing of any plan. She was on her knees by the morris-chair, her arms flung about the strong little figure whose dearest hopes she had spoiled: begging mamma to forgive her for being such a disappointment and failure as a daughter, for seeming so ungrateful and unreasonable, saying that she would do anything, anything to make up for all that had gone amiss.

And mamma, already somewhat propitiated, it had seemed, by the return of the money, said presently, with some emotion of her own, that she would try to regard it as a closed episode. She, with her tireless energies, was not one to cry forever over milk hopelessly spilt. But neither was she one to temper justice with too much mercy, and her final word on the matter was a final one, indeed: "But of course you can never make it up to me, Carlisle, never...." And Carlisle, rising, knew even better than mamma how sad and true this was. There was only one thing that her mother had wanted of her, and that thing she had not done. Life, even on this day of song and mist, was seen to be inexorable....

She was in her room for a little while, and it came to be eleven o'clock: five hours and a half.... While she unwisely lingered there, dreamily irresolute between a walk and a drive, she was summoned to the drawing-room by a call from Mattie Allen, not seen of her since the dinner at the New Arlington last week. Mattie stayed a long time; and before she went—of course—other callers had drifted in....

"Are you going to Sue Louise's bridge to-night?" demanded Mattie, continuing to inspect her with evident curiosity.

"Oh, Mats! I forgot all about it—horrors!... And I've made another engagement!"

"That means you don't want to go, Cally. You know it does...."

Cally confessed to a certain want of enthusiasm; asked her friend if she, too, didn't weary of their little merry-go-round at times. Nothing of the sort, however, would be admitted by Mats, who was now known to be having a really serious try for J. Forsythe Avery.

“Dear,” she went on before long, “do you know you seem to be changing *entirely* lately? And toward me specially.... I—I’ve wondered a *great* deal if I’ve done something to offend you.”

Cally embraced her; spoke with reassuring tenderness. And there was compunction in these endearments. She and Mattie had been intimate friends as long as she could remember; and now it had come over her suddenly that it would nevermore be with them quite as it had been before. Must life be this way, that greetings over there would always mean farewells here?...

Page 177

And then Mats, quite mollified, was speaking in her artless way of Hugo Canning, who had so obviously been on her mind all along.

“People keep asking me,” she said, still just a little plaintive, “and I have to say I don’t know *one thing*. It makes me so ashamed. They think I’m not your best friend any more.”

Cally observed that all that was too absurd. For the rest, she seemed somewhat evasive.

“I feel, dearie,” said Mats, “that I *ought* to know what concerns your life’s happiness. You don’t know how anxious I’ve been about you while you were sick....” If there seemed a tiny scratch in that, the next remark was more like a purr: “People say that he did something perfectly terrible, and you threw him over.”

“Well, Mats, you know people always get things exactly wrong.”

“Then you didn’t?” demanded her best friend, with a purely feminine gleam.

And Cally, ardently wishing to be free of this subject, said gaily that Mr. Canning had thrown *her* over—the second time, too! So she had told him that she had *some* spirit, that some day he would do that once too often....

“Oh, you’re joking,” said Mats, quite pettishly. “Dear, I *don’t* care for jokes.”

And then, as she gazed, not without envy, at her friend’s profile, so strangely sweet and gay, she exclaimed suddenly in a shocked tone: “I believe you really did do it!”

“Whisper it not in Gath,” said Cally, with shining calm....

It was a belief, so mamma had cried in the midnight, which nobody outside of institutions for the feeble-minded would ever hold. But Cally was struck only with Mattie’s enormous seriousness. Self-reproach filled her for the interval that seemed to lie between them....

“Mats, you know I’ve never kept secrets from you. I’ll tell you everything you want to hear about it, from beginning to end. Only—not to-day.”

The kaleidoscope shifted: Mattie faded out of the purview, and in her stead sat the Misses Winton, who had helped to pass the time in Europe last year, but whose presence had a contrary effect to-day. And she wondered how they could not see for themselves what a shell of a hostess they were talking at. All her being was so far away from company: one half of her continually flowing back over the months; the rest always going forward to the afternoon, and beyond; nothing at all left here....

Certainly she would tease him a little about the neat way he and papa had dropped her out of the Works. "*And I thought I was the one who was doing it, too*!..."

Callers gone; and then mamma, in the vein of dignity, was inviting her opinion about the color scheme of her luncheon-table. And with what an uprush of affection she responded, what eagerness to help, to be friends again!... And then it was time for her to make ready for luncheon herself. One-thirty o'clock; a long day....

Page 178

In the May-time, once, Hugo had asked her to name a day, and she had named the seventeenth of October. And now the seventeenth was here, to-day. Her wedding-day it might have been, but for this or that: and behold, her high banquet was laid at the board of the Cooneys, cold corned beef and baked potatoes, with sliced peaches such as turn nicely from the can for an unexpected guest.

Cally was glad to be with her cousins to-day. The simple and friendly atmosphere here was mightily comfortable. Never had they seemed so poor to her, never so fine and merry in their poverty. Her heart went out to them.

They were all well now, the Cooneys, and the table was their clearing-house. There was much talk, of the new Works and other matters; great argument. Two faces were missing: Tee Wee, who pursued his studies at the University, and Chas, who was lunching from a box at his desk, snowed under with work accumulated during his sickness. In their places, however, sat Cousin Martha Heth, who was described as "very miserable" with her various ailments, but whose strength at conversation, regarding symptoms, seemed as the strength of ten.

Round Cally the Cooney talk rattled on; family jokes kept flickering up; strange catchwords evoked unexpected laughter. The woman of all work waited spasmodically upon the table; she proved to be Lugene, none other than the girl Hen and Cally had found on Dunbar Street, that day long ago.... Old times; so, too, when the Major told with accustomed verve how papa, a little shaver then, had brought the note from Aunt Molly down to camp, fifty years ago....

Across the table sat Looloo, the best-looking of all the good-looking Cooneys. She had lucid gray eyes, with the prettiest black lashes; and Cally found herself continually looking at them.... Strange how expressive eyes could be, how revealing, looking things unspoken that influenced one's whole life. Imagine somebody with eyes something like Looloo's, say, to have had totally different ones; small, glassy black eyes like shoe-buttons, for instance, or to have worn thick blue-tinged glasses, like Evey's grandmother....

A hand waved before her own eyes; a voice of raillery said: "Come back!"

"I'm right here.... What did you say?"

"You were picking flowers ten thousand miles away. 'Cause why? 'Not any, thank you,' isn't the right reply to 'Please give me the salt.'"

"She's in love," said the Major, a gallant in his day.

Cally, handing the salt to Hen, said: "I am, indeed,—with Looloo. Don't you notice that she's getting prettier every day?"

Looloo, fair as a lily, proved that blushes made her prettier still; the Major said finely, “Praise from Sir Hubert”; and Aunt Molly, giving the same truth a sound wholesome turn, observed that Loo needn’t get set up, for she’d never be as pretty as Cally, no matter how she improved.

Cousin Martha’s remark was: “But to go back to what I was saying, Cally. That Wednesday night was the worst I ever spent....”

Page 179

And Cally felt apologetic to her poor relative to-day, a good deal ashamed before her. Her sudden impulse had been to ask papa's old cousin to come and stay in one of the four spare rooms at home (thus permitting Chas to come down from the Cooney attic); but she had had to put that impulse down. The Heths had not built walls around their little island for nothing....

They were in the limousine, she and Hen, driving down to Saltman's. Hen said she would be delighted to come in that evening, and play bridge with Uncle Thornton. She was a player of known merits, rather famous for successes with hare-brained no-trumpers. And Cally, thinking what man she should ask for Hen, discovered suddenly that her thought was going much beyond a table of bridge to-night; that what she was really planning was to marry her cousin off this year. And she found herself searching about for somebody very nice for Hen, very desirable.

"Oh, by the bye," she said, presently—"I was just thinking—do you remember that corduroy suit I had last year—striped gray, with a Russian blouse?"

Hen, it seemed, remembered this suit perfectly. And Cally said no wonder, since she had worn it till she would be ashamed to be caught in it again.

"I was wondering," said she, "if you could make it do for anything, Hen. It would honestly be a favor if you'd take it off my hands."

Henrietta swept on her a look of incredulous delight.

"Cally!... Why, you good old bluffer! You know perfectly well that suit's a beauty, as good as new—"

"No, oh, no! Indeed, it isn't," said Cally, quite eagerly. "You've forgotten—it's worn, oh, quite badly worn. I'll show you to-night when you come. And then you'd have to cut it down, too.... Only you mustn't ever wear it around me, Hen, I'm really so sick of the sight of it...."

So Hen presently said: "There's no use my pretending or being coy, Cally. Oh, I'd dearly love to have it. I've been wondering what on earth I'd do for a nice suit this year.... Why, it's like an answer to prayer...."

And what had she ever done in a human world to entitle her to be bestowing last-year's suits upon Henrietta Cooney, the busy and useful? "She's worth three of me," thought Cally, "and I've been looking down on her all this time just because they're poor. I seem to be little and mean clear through...."

And suddenly she saw that memories had been gathering here; that Saltman's hard-worked stenographer had grown intimate and dear....

Her hand closed over Hen's, and she was speaking hurriedly:

"Hen, do you know you're a great old dear? Don't look.... I've never told you how good you were to me this summer, when I was so unhappy, and nobody else seemed to care.... And since I've been back, too, helping me more than you know, perhaps. I didn't appreciate it all at the time, quite, but I do now. And I won't forget what a good friend you've been to me, what an old trump...."

Page 180

Hen, taken quite by surprise, turned on her a somewhat misty gaze. She answered that Cally was a darling goose; with other things solacing and sweet. And then the two cousins were parting, the one to her typewriter, the other to her ease: but both feeling that a new tie bound them which would not loosen soon.

The car started from Saltman's door, and Cally glanced at her watch: it was just three o'clock. Probably at this moment Dr. Vivian and papa were shaking hands in the office at the Works. Why, oh, why, hadn't she said that she would go, too, as she had so much wanted to do? Surely she could not have harmed that meeting; she might even have helped a little.

About her were the bustle and clangor of busy Centre Street. People hurrying upon a thousand errands, each intent upon his own business, under the last wrapping each soul alone in the crowded world. And no one knew of his brother's high adventures. Men walked brushing elbows with angels, and unaware....

She had had a little sister named Rosemary, two years older than she, and very lovely in the little picture of her that papa always carried in the locket on his watch-chain. Often Cally had wished for her sister; never so much as through this day. There was one, she liked to think, whom she could have talked her heart out to, sure that she would understand all, share all. But Rosemary had been dead these twenty years....

"Drive me a little, William, please.... For half an hour, and then home...."

The car went far over familiar streets that she had first seen from a perambulator. She sat almost motionless, the tangible world faded out. It was good to be alone; this was a solitude peopled with fancies. Her mind dreamed back over the long strange year, while her steadfast face was shining toward the Future.

* * * * *

Strange enough it seemed now; but till the other day Hugo and Dr. Vivian had hardly once met in the thoughts of Cally Heth. They had hardly met in life, never exchanged a word since the night in the summer-house: so she, untrained to discernment, had supposed that they had nothing to do with each other. Now, in the last few days, it had come to seem that these two had, in her, been pitted against each other from the beginning.

Forces not of her making had cut and patterned her life; and she, driven on by feelings which she herself had hardly understood, had crumpled up that pattern and seized the shears of destiny in her own hand. The groove she had been set and clamped so fast into ran straight as a string into Hugo Canning's arms; but she had broken out of her groove, and Hugo was gone, to cross her path no more. And her mother thought, and Hugo had said almost with his parting breath, that she had been driven to these

madnesses by mere foolish femininisms, new little ideas picked up from Cooneys or elsewhere.

Page 181

It was true that she had these ideas; true, too, that she was not alone with them. She had been drilled from birth to the ranks of the beguilers of men, their sirens but their inferiors; and something in her, even before this year, had rebelled at that rating of herself, dimly perceiving—as she had heard a man say once—that marriage was better regarded as a career than as a means of livelihood. She had been drilled again to believe that her happiness depended on money in quantities, things had; but then, at the first pinch of real trouble, these things had seemed to sag beneath her, and she perceived dimly, once more, that she had built her house upon something like sand. And if her particular experiences here had been unique, she had seen that her experience was, after all, a common one. As if with eyes half-opened, she had divined all about her other people making the discoveries she had made; or, better yet, knowing these truths without having to discover them. She was but one of a gathering company, men as well as women, old with young....

Hugo had stood rock-like across the way she was moving. And so Hugo had lost her.

But these things seemed hardly to matter now; it all went down so much deeper. Surely it was over something bigger than her “little views” that her story-book prince had locked arms with the lame slum doctor, curiously recognized by him as an adversary at sight.

They had entered her life in almost the same hour, two men so different that she had come at last to see them as full opposites. So entering together, they had both become involved with her in the first moral problem of her life, which also began in that hour. And upon that problem each had been called, in turn, to ring his mettle. One, the fine flower of her own world, with a high respect for that world’s opinions and on the whole a low esteem of the worth of a woman, had found her completely satisfying as she was. The other, a wanderer from some other planet, with his strange indifference to the world’s values and his extraordinary hope of everything human, had been so passionately dissatisfied with her that he, a kind man surely, had broken out in speech that had left a scar upon her memory. And upon the stranger’s shocking appraisement of her, there had, indeed, hung a tale.

There were times when it had seemed that everything she had done afterwards had been but stages of an effort, months prolonged, to shake herself free from that compassionate *God pity you*....

But no; she knew it was not that way exactly. Before that night she had felt vague reachings and had put them down; and similarly afterwards. Buttressed about with her island’s social security, strong in her woman’s faculty for believing what she needed to believe, she could easily persuade herself, or almost, that there had been only an unfortunate misunderstanding about Jack Dalhousie, that she personally hadn’t done anything at all. She remembered

Page 182

that she had all but put the matter where it would trouble her no more. And then there had come a night when she saw that the stranger, by a certain gentleness and trust there were in him, had not been able to believe his own hard words of her. This man believed that she was good; believed it because he himself was good. And the moment of that revelation had been terrible to her. She had felt in Hen's parlor the smart of coals of fire, the strange, new shame of being trusted, but untrustworthy. So there had entered her a guilty disquiet: and afterwards, however she had struggled, however Hugo's protecting strength had compassed her about, that novel sense had kept growing through the months, steadily gathering momentum....

All this was quite clear to her now. Nothing had made her tell the truth about Jack Dalhousie except that one man had expected her to. Of all that had happened to her, here was the beating heart.

No one in her life had met her on this ground before. She had been expected to be a charming woman if she could, a woman as ornamental as possible. He only had expected her to be a good woman; and something in her had found the strange call irresistible. He, by the trusting eyes he had, had put her upon her honor; not her "woman's honor," but her honor; and she, who had never had an honor before, had grown one, all for him. As long as she could remember, men had paid tribute to her in all the ways of men with maids. But he alone had put any trust in her as a free and moral being; and she had bent the high heavens and all but broken her mother's heart that he should not have trusted her in vain.

She was far, far from being a good woman. Hugo certainly was anything but a bad man. Yet, when all was said, it was her expanding desire to be good that Hugo had stood against. And the collision had destroyed him.

Was this the great mystery then, the world's secret? Was this the wish that each human being had, planted away in the deeps, overlaid and choked, forgotten, yet charged with omnipotence: *the wish to be good*? Were they all waiting for somebody to pass by, sounding the secret call, to drop all and follow?...

Oh, wonder, wonder, that the simple faith of one good man should have power to overthrow princes and powers!...

The car rolled swiftly, its windows open to the sunny day. All about were the sights and noises of city streets. But the flying panorama brought no distraction: out there, men walked as trees. There blew a light autumn wind, gently kicking at Cally's veil, waving tendrils of fine hair about her face. Unaware, suffering had laid its touch upon her; this face was lovely with a deeper meaning: and yet the young girl's April-freshness clung to

her still. She was in the first exquisite bloom of her womanhood. And she sat very still in the rolling car, full of a breathless wonder at the miracle of life.

It had been the year of her spirit's Odyssey. And now, when she came at last to fair haven, marvel fell upon marvel: and the quest of her heart stood saluting her from the shore. What need had she to ponder or to justify, she who, setting out to find happiness upon the shining earth, had so strangely found it among the yet more shining stars?

Page 183

Very slowly, very delicately, had knowledge unfolded within her. On a day there had been pain, and nothing. On a day there had been thrilling peace, and luminous wings beating so strong, so sure....

To love; to love unasked....

She knew that women thought this a shame to them; she had thought it so herself. Yet could it be? Had he not taught her this, or nothing, that to give was ever a finer thing than to take? Was it a shame to love what was lovable, and fine and beautiful and sweet? Ah, no; surely the shame for her would be, knowing these things now at their value, not to love them, to hold back thriftily for the striking of a bargain. Was not here, and no otherwhere, the true badge of the inferior, to measure the dearest beats of one's heart as a prudent trader measures?

So Cally Heth, the often loved and lovely, was strong to feel on her wonderful day. Beneath the maiden's invincible reserve, under the mad sweetness of this unrest, clear upon that Future which was so enveloped in a golden haze, she felt a pride in her own human worthiness, as one who now does the best thing of her life. She had always wanted to love above her: how time and this man had invested her ideal with a richer meaning!... Was not this the touchstone of that change within herself she had sought, that day when Colonel Dalhousie's rod had chastened her?

Many symbols of happiness had shone and beckoned about her, and she had turned her back on all of them to follow a man in a patched coat whose power was only that he spoke simply of God, and believed in the goodness of his fellows. Over the gulf that lay between their worlds, this man had called to her: and now she had made him her last full response, which was herself. He was the saint in her life; and she had found him beneath all disguises, and laid her heart at his feet.

* * * * *

Home again; dreams laid by. There was action for a space. Anticipation painted the world in rose.

It was after four; by the clock on the mantel. Cally stood at the window, dressed, waiting. She was bound for a workers' meeting in a somewhat dilapidated Settlement House in the slums, which only the other day had been an abandoned hotel, for cause. And never in her vivid life had she dressed with greater care....

She gazed down, upon a street which she did not see. Ten minutes past four: but twenty minutes more, out of the long day. By now, he had already left the Works for the Dabney House.... And she was thinking that never but once had he made a personal remark to her: when he had thought, among the hard things, that she was lovely to the eye. But all that was a long, long time ago....

From the door below there issued her mother's guests, departing. Two strolled away up the afternoon street; one drove off in an open car; two stepped into an old-fashioned family carriage. Then, after a little interval, Mrs. Heth herself came out with two more women; and these three drove away in the Byrd car, which had been observed waiting down there.

Page 184

Cally was alone in the house. And it was good to be alone.

There whizzed up, from the opposite direction, yet another car, jerking to a standstill at the door. It caught the girl's notice; her vague thought was that it was William, come a little early. But she saw at once that this was a strange vehicle, a hired one by the look of it, and consciousness dreamed out of her eyes again....

The tide of her being pulsed strong within her now. All day her strange feeling was as if an enveloping shell had, somewhere lately, been chipped from about her, revealing to her half-startled gaze a horizon far wider than any guessed before. By the new summonings that made music in her heart, by these undreamed aspirations and reaching affections, there was the thrilling seeming that always heretofore she had lived in some dull half-deadness. And she could not doubt that this port where she had arrived at last was no other than the gate of Life....

"Why, that's Chas Cooney!" said Cally, suddenly, gazing down.

From the cab below there had stepped a tall young man, out upon her sidewalk. She recognized her cousin with instant surprise; and consciousness, returning to her again, set a little frown between her level brows. Chas made her think at once of the Works. How was it that he, so busy that he could not even stop for dinner, came driving up here in the middle of the afternoon? Above all, who was it that he was helping, so slowly and carefully, from his hired car?

The girl gazed with growing tensity; her hat-brim pressed the window. The downward view was unimpeded, all clear; only, things moved so slowly. However, a little at a time, the second person in the car came emerging into the sunshine.

And Cally's heart lifted with an appalling wrench as she saw that it was her father.

There had been an accident at the Works: that was clear in one eye-sweep. Her father had been hurt. He was bareheaded; a long splotch ran up his cheek, into his hair. He was dragging over the sidewalk, leaning heavily upon Chas's arm. One of his own arms hung unnaturally still at his side. More horrible than any of these things was his face, so ghastly green in the light.

And in the watcher at the window, life shocked instantly to death. For in the flash in which she saw her father's face, she knew. No need of speech; no more news to break. Had she not felt that something terrible would happen at the Works some day? There had happened a thing more terrible than all her nightmares had devised....

She did not remember going downstairs at all. But she must have gone down very fast, for when she opened the door the two men were just stepping into the vestibule, Chas's hand reaching out toward the bell....

One look went between her and papa. Did he see death in her face?

“You heard ...” he said, standing there, his voice so curious. And she could have screamed for that look in his eyes.

Page 185

“No,” said Cally. Yet surely she had heard.

He was limping through the door toward her; dirt on his clothes; dark stains on his fine snowy waistcoat. And then his arm was hard round her neck; papa’s head buried upon her breast, like a sorry boy’s.

“My poor little girl.”

So there had been a glimmer within, after all. It went out, with a mortal throe. All was black.

But surely this was quite, quite unreal; but one more horror of the night, the last and the worst. Ah, surely, surely, she had but to make one great effort to find herself sitting up in the dark; trembling, but alive.

“How badly are you hurt?”

“Nothing.... Arm’s broke.... No one else.”

Then they were standing in the wide dim hall. The door was shut, and she was holding by the knob. And she heard a voice, so small, so strangely calm.

“How did it happen, papa?”

Papa had his sound arm raised, his hand rubbing vaguely at his lips. But it was not his own pain and shock that had bleached those lips so white.

“Floor crashed in—without warning ... broke through. He’d made a suggestion—some braces. So I took him up to look. We were standing there ... standing underneath. Standing there, talking. And the floor gave way ... cracked ... caved in on us. One machine came down....”

The voice, too, seemed to cave in. And some one was squeezing her hand, very hard.

So nothing was wanting from the finished picture, not the last exquisite stroke. He, the believer, had believed even in her father’s floors. It was she who had doubted, she who had asked the help that never failed. Had he not told her not to worry?...

But if only she hadn’t stopped going inside. If only her heart would soon begin to beat again....

Chas Cooney was winking his keen eyes.

“He’d got clear—there was plenty of time.... One of the negro women was knocked over by a flying splinter.... Things were falling all around. So he stopped for her.... She

wasn't hurt at all, when we pulled her out.... Of course Uncle Thornton was back in it all. A beam knocked him senseless...."

"Surgeon said it was instantaneous," came papa's shadowy voice. "Well.... It's on my head. I'm responsible. I know that."

And he sat down uncertainly, and somewhat pitifully, on the tall hall-chair....

Then nobody said anything more. There would never be anything more to say. Time would go on a long while yet, but no one would ever add another touch here. This was the end of the world.

He had trusted the Heths too far.

And how strange and void it was at the world's end, how deadly still but for the faint roarings of waters far off.

She was walking toward her father. Through the roaring there came a voice, so little and so remote.

"Papa, you must come up to bed.... I'll telephone for the doctor."

Page 186

But she did not go to the telephone; not even to her father. She brushed her hand upward vaguely, fending away the advancing blackness. And then it would have been with her as with poor Miller that day at the Works, but that Charles Cooney, who had been watching her closely, was quick and strong.

XXXIV

In which to love much is to be much loved, and Kern's
Dearest Dream (but one) comes True.

Beyond the Great Gulf, there was news coming, too: coming with the click of hoofs on cobble-stones, and the harsh clanging of a wagon; seeping and spreading through the shabby street with mysterious velocity. Windows rattled up; a word flew from lip to lip; people were running.

There came the Reverend George Dayne, of the Charities, and hard behind him Labor Commissoner O'Neill, mopping his face as he ran. These two were known to the neighborhood, with their right of going in, and no questions asked. Out again came the ambulance surgeon, shaking his head jauntily at all inquiries. Out lastly, after an interval, issued Mr. Pond, and disappeared into the establishment of Henry Bloom, who was known to have loaned his camp-chairs free, the day Doctor got up this here Settlement....

Then stillness enveloped all. Nothing seemed to stir. And no one could remember when he had seen those windows dark before.

Within, upstairs, the two men, alike only in this one tie, stood about, waiting; waiting for Pond's return; waiting only because they were loath to go. What little had been for their hands to do was done now.

The men of the yellow wagon, breathing hard as they came up the steps, had sought out the bedroom. But Mr. Dayne said that a soldier should lie in his tent. So they had made sure that the three-legged lounge in the office was steady, and got a fresh counterpane from red-lidded Mrs. Garland. Then, when Pond was gone, the other two had thought to make ready against the arrival of Bloom. However, they were soon brought to pause here, finding nothing to make ready with. There was an overcoat hung in the clothes closet, but otherwise it was entirely bare; hangers dangling empty. The men had found the sight somewhat sad.

But Mr. Dayne, who had been a parson before he was a Secretary, had said no matter. Let him go in his patches upon his great adventure....

It had seemed natural to these two to be doing the last small services. There was no family here; friends' love was needed. But now there was only waiting....

Mr. Dayne, in Canal Street in his own business, had been at the Heth Works in the first uproar. At intervals, he had told the story to the others: a story of one machine too many unloaded on a strained floor; of a dry beam breaking with a report like a cannon; of men and women stampeding in the wild fear that the building was about to collapse. On the second floor, but two had kept their heads; and the young doctor, for all his bad foot, had been the quicker. It was supposed that the base of the machine itself had struck him, glancing. Mr. Heth, found two feet away, was buried by a litter of debris; his escape from death was deemed miraculous. And when they brought him round, it was told that his first word had been: "Vivian hurt?..."

Page 187

Much remained puzzling: in chief the strange amiability of the master of the Works toward the man he had once threatened to break for libel. They had stood there chatting like friends, laughing.

But here Commissioner O'Neill could give little light. Last night his friend had told him, indeed, with evidences of strange happiness, that there was to be a new Heth Works at once. But he was mysteriously reserved as to how this triumph for the O'Neill administration had been brought to pass, saying repeatedly: "It's a sort of secret. I can't tell you that, old fellow." But O'Neill remembered now one thing he had said, with quite an excited air, which might be a sort of clue: "Don't you get it, Sam?... It's all good. Everybody's good ... Why, I've known it all the time."...

Now the two men had fallen silent. They were in the old waiting-room, with the office door fast shut between. Royalty had slept in this room once. It was decaying now, and bare as your hand but for the row of kitchen chairs along the wall. The minister kept walking about; kept humming beneath his breath. Once Sam O'Neill caught a line of that song: *The victory of life is won.* A strange sentiment at this time certainly; thoroughly clerical, though. It was a professional matter with Dayne; only he, O'Neill, had been really close to V.V. And he was continually burdened with a certain sense of personal responsibility for it all....

"I'd like to have the doctor for that little girl in there," said Mr. Dayne.

The Commissioner, who was getting really stout these days, cleared his throat.

"How's she goin' to get on without him?"

"Ah, how?" said the clergyman, musing.

The stillness was like the silence before the dawn. Oppressive, too, was the sense of emptiness. Two men in this chamber; one small watcher beyond the door; otherwise emptiness, sensed through all the two hundred rooms of the deserted pile. Life died from the world. People forgot. Stillness, death, loneliness, and destitution. They had picked him to the bone, and left him....

And then, as thoughts like these saddened the thoughts of the two men, there was heard as it were the whir of wings in his old hotel. And the crows came.

I say the crows came. They came in their own way; but so they had always come. Came in the guise of an elderly tramp, vacant-eyed and straggly-bearded, soiled, tentative, and reluctant. But what mattered things like this: since in his wings, which were only hairy arms that needed soap, he brought the raiment? Such a pile of them, too, such royal abundance. A fine black cutaway coat, a handsome pair of "extra"

trousers, shirts, and shoes, and, peeping beneath all, glimpses of a pretty blue suit quite obviously as good as new.

There stood the wonder, silent and uncouth, in the doorway. Do you doubt that Sam O'Neill and Mr. Dayne knew, the moment their eyes saw, that here were the crows come? How they gazed and gazed, and how poor Mister Garland, ever retiring of habit, squirmed and shifted over an uneasy heart....

Page 188

He did not care to talk with gentlemen, did not Mister; gentlemen of that cloth particularly. Doubt not that in institutions men wearing such vests as this had had their cleanly will of him on winter nights. So he asked his question dumbly, with a movement of matted head and eyebrow; and when Mr. Dayne answered in a curious voice, “Yes ... he’s gone,” the last expectancy faded from the rough vague face. He sidled in, timid and unwilling; laid his burden, speechless, upon a chair. And then he was shambling furtively out the door again, when the parson’s hand took his shoulder.

“Why are you bringing them back now? He gave them all to you, didn’t he?”

The visitor spoke for the first time, suddenly, low and whining.

“‘S a Gawd’s truth, Reverend, I never hooked nothin’ off him, an’ I was goin’ to bring ’em back anyways. Nothin’ wore at all, gents, you can see yourself, cep a time or two mebbe outen that there derby....”

The man himself could see no point in it all except that gents had him in charge; a threatening predicament. But Mr. Dayne’s gentle suasion prevailed. Out, gradually, came the little story which he was to tell sometimes in after years, and think about oftener....

Mister was bringing back Doctor’s things because he had never felt right about taking them.

The cutaway coat had been the beginning of it all, it seemed. The gift of so fine a Sunday coat had bewildered the recipient; he had been on the point of handing it back right there. However, nature had conquered, then and subsequently; there had accumulated a collection of clothing secretly laid away in a place he had. The man had kept asking, he said, out of habit—“more jest to see if he’d give ’em to yer like.” But he seemed to feel, in a certain dim way, that there was a sort of contest on between him and Doctor.

“The innercent look he had to him, yer might say,” he said, groping for words to answer the high-vested inquisitor. “Like a child like. Never scolded yer wunst.... Just up and give yer all yer wanted....”

The blue suit, given yesterday, seemed to have been conceived as a kind of test case. The man appeared to feel that, once refused, a sort of spell on him would be broken; he would then get out all his store and wear them freely. So he had told a tall story in the office: how he was surely going to settle down and be respectable this time, and was obliged to have him a good nice suit fer to git started in.... And Doctor had given him such a funny look that for a minute he thought sure he had him. But no, the young man had laughed suddenly, as at a joke, and said: “Well, you sit there, Mister, till I take these off....” Only not to tell Mrs. Garland. Took him right back, sure did....

“So then I thinks,” said Mister, the professional quaver returning to his voice, “it’s no better’n thievin’ for to take off an innercent like him, and thinks I, I’ll git the lot of ’em, and give him like a surprise. ‘S a Gawd’s truth, gents, like I’m tellin’ yer. Nothin’ at all wore but mebbe that there derby, like I up and tole yer....”

Page 189

His word had never been doubted: this passed invention. And he was thanked, not chidden for his narrative, and Reverend said:

“He shall wear that suit for his burial....”

So the crows flitted out of the door again, their errand done; and behind them was a deeper stillness than they had found.

The old waiting-room, a little dark at best, grew dimmer. Sunlight faded from the ruined floor. The glorious afternoon was drawing in. The men did not speak. And then in the lengthening silence, there floated up small noises: a door creaking open; quiet feet upon the stairs; a faint swishing as of a skirt.

The parson was standing by the half-open door.

“D’you think, sir,” he spoke suddenly aloud, “there’s any way to preach to a man, like just being better than he is?”

O’Neill roused, but made no answer. He had been thinking of the day he had seen this fellow Garland dodging down the hall with those trousers there. Then, becoming aware of the footsteps, he said:

“Pond back ... Is it?”

But Mr. Dayne, looking out down the corridor, said no. After a pause, he added, in a yet lower voice:

“It’s young Cooney, from the Works ... And a lady.”

A change had gone over the parson’s kind face, making it still kinder. His sense of surrounding desolation ebbed from him. People acknowledged their heavy debt; paid as stoutly as they could. On the stairs there he saw, coming, the daughter of the man whose negligence had taken to-day a young life not easily to be spared.

“They’re both friends of mine,” added Mr. Dayne, gently. “Perhaps you will excuse me a moment?”

And he stepped out into the hall, shutting the door quietly behind him.

* * * * *

So Mr. Dayne thought. But under the heavy veil she wore, this was less a daughter than a woman: Cally, who had loved for a day and in the evening heard that her love was dead.

The thought behind the venture had been Chas's. Nothing required him at the House of Heth; he was for getting his sister and going to see what help the Dabney House might need. And at the last minute, she had put on her hat again, and gone too. Nothing that Mr. Dayne had felt about the loneliness of this end could touch what Cally had felt. Of whom, too, was help more required than of her, now or never any more? So they had driven three from Saltman's to the old hotel, where she had thought to come to a meeting to-day. And then Henrietta, who had come out from her typewriter strong and white as ice, methodically sticking in hatpins as she crossed the sidewalk; Hen, the iron-hearted, had quite suddenly broken down; laying her cold face in Cally's lap, weeping wildly that she would not bear it....

So Cally must brave the stairs without her, must speak to who might be here. But she did not mind. Strength had come to her with the consciousness that had returned all too quickly: the dead strength of the inanimate. She was dark and cold within as the spaces between the worlds....

Page 190

And now the two cousins met Mr. Dayne in this strange endless corridor; and knew that no services were asked of them.

They greeted with little speech. Mr. Dayne told of the simple dispositions they were making. Chas explained how Mr. Heth had tried to communicate with Mrs. Mason,—-whom Mr. Dayne had quite overlooked, it seemed,—but found that she was out of town; had telegraphed; how he would have come down with them now, but had had to stop for the setting of his arm. Uncle Thornton would come this evening....

“Ah, that’s kind of him,” said Mr. Dayne. “He must be in much pain....”

Then silence fell. There seemed nothing to say or do. How think that she could serve—mitigate these numb horrors of pain and self-reproach? All was over.

“Where is he?” said Cally, her voice so little and calm.

The clergyman told her. And then all three stood looking down the corridor to the door at the end of it: a shut door marked in white letters: DR. VIVIAN.... But nothing could hurt her now.

“We thought that was right,” said Mr. Dayne.... “Will you go in for a moment?”

Briefly the girl’s veiled eyes met his. He was aware that a little tremor went through her; perhaps he then understood a little further. And he thought he had never seen anybody so beautiful and white.

He added in his comforting way: “There’s no one at all with him except the little girl here, Corinne, that he was kind to....”

Surely there was never a loneliness like this loneliness.

“I will go, if I may,” said Cally.

Chas was eyeing her, unbelievably grave, turning his hat between his hands. And then she remembered Hen, left alone, who would not be comforted.

She whispered: “Don’t wait for me.... I’ll come in a minute.”

The young man hesitated; they spoke a moment; it was so arranged. Chas was tipping away from her down the well of the stairs.

And she and the clergyman were walking up the corridor, his hand at her elbow, to the door with the white letters on it.

As Mr. Dayne’s hand touched the knob, she spoke again, very low.

“Is he.... Is he—much ...?”

“No,” said Mr. Dayne, “the injuries were internal. There’s hardly a mark....”

So, opening the door softly, he left her.

And she was within, the door a step or two behind her, in front a long space, drawn blinds, and the indistinguishable twilight. Somewhere before her was the mortal man who had pledged her one day that he would prove his friendship with his life.

And how came she here; by what right?

She had perceived remotely that she was not alone. Out of the dim great stretches there emerged advancing a little figure, black-clad; advancing silent, with lowered head. Drawing near, she did not look up, did not speak: she was merely fading from the room.

The figure was vaguely apprehended, as one upon another planet. But Cally, stirring slightly as she slipped past, made a movement with her hand and said, just audibly:

Page 191

“Don’t go.”

The girl must have paused. There came a tiny voice:

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll ... just step out.” And then, yet fainter: “I was wishin’ you’d come, ma’am.”

It was the stillness of the world’s last Sabbath. Gathering dusk was here, and mortal fear. Her limbs ran to marble. There came again the lifeless whisper.

“Don’t be afraid, ma’am.... He looks so beautiful.”

The understanding speech, the voice, seemed to penetrate her consciousness. Her eyes drew out of the dusk, turned upon the small figure at her side: the little girl he had been fond of, her father’s three years’ buncher. And then she heard herself breathing suddenly, faintly:

“Ah!... You poor, poor child!...”

And her heart, which had been quite dead, was suddenly alive and twisting within her....

She had been engulfed in her own abyss. Tragedy was on every side, horrors pouring in, swamping her being. Feeling had drowned in the icy void. Not Hen’s tears had touched her, not her father’s stricken grief. But when her eyes came upon this small face, something written there pierced her through and through. Such a shocking little face it was, so pinched with no hope of tears....

In the darkness of the shuttered office, two stood near who were worlds apart. And, for the first time since she had looked down from her window at home, Cally was lifted out of herself....

“I—you must let me see you—in a day or two, won’t you?” she said hurriedly, below her breath. “I should like so much ... to help you, if I could....”

A quiver went over the little mask; but the girl spoke in the same stony way:

“Oh, ma’am ... it’s so kind.... I’ll go now.”

But the hollowness of Cally’s speech had mocked the sudden sympathy upwelling within her. Her arm was upon the work-girl’s frail shoulder; her indistinct voice suddenly tremulous.

“Don’t think I imagine that any one can ever replace.... You must know I understand ... what your loss is.”

Kern shrunk against the wall by the door. No moment this, to speak of what had so long been hid.

“He was like a father to me, ma’am, an’ more....”

And then, as if to prove that she claimed no right at all in this room, as if all depended on her establishing finally the humble and spiritual nature of her regard, she breathed what in happier days had been close to her heart:

“He was teaching me to be a lady....”

Who shall say how marvels befall, and the dearest dream comes true? Was it the pitifulness of the little hope laid bare? Or the secret shrinking behind that, but surprised at last? Or was it the knowledge of a beautiful delicacy shown by this little girl before to-day?

Miss Heth’s arm was about her neck, and her voice, which was so pretty even when you could hardly hear it, said, true as true:

Page 192

“I think you’ve been a lady all along, Co-rinne.”

And then the bands about Kern’s heart snapped, and she could cry....

The storm came suddenly, like the bursting of a dam. A bad time certainly; it was hard to be torn so, yet to make no cry or sound; in any case, distressing to others. And surely salt water couldn’t be good for this lovely cloth, where her face lay....

Yet one doesn’t think overmuch of things like that, when the barriers on the great common go toppling down. And there was Sisterhood there all the time....

And above the stillness and the racking, Kern heard his beautiful lady’s voice once more, speaking to her own heart now, so low, oh, so broken:

“*Ah, but he was teaching me*....”

And then Kern must go quickly, lest she disgrace herself forever; screaming aloud as she had heard women who were not ladies....

The girl was gone, her head between her hands. And Cally Heth stood alone in the more than churchly stillness.

She was breaking up within. The drowned being stirred to life, with multiplying pains. And yet, in giving comfort, she had mysteriously taken it. There came to her a fortitude that was not of death.

* * * * *

No sound penetrated to the silent waiting-room.

The two men there spoke little. They had talked what they had to say. Sam O’Neill looked at his watch; it was twenty-five minutes to six. And, a moment later, Director Pond came up the steps, entered and said:

“Bloom will be here at six o’clock.”

They spoke briefly of this. The friends of the neighborhood were to be admitted; it was agreed that this should be arranged for to-morrow morning. Pond then said:

“Is Miss Heth in there?”

Mr. Dayne said that she was. And Sam O’Neill, who had not known who the visitor was, first looked startled and then lapsed off into heavy musings....

The Director sat down on a chair by the door. His strong face looked tired.

“Won’t you, a little later,” he said to Mr. Dayne, “go down and say a few words to the people outside? They’d appreciate it.”

The parson, biting his crisp mustache, said that he would.

Pond sat absently eyeing the pile of men’s clothes beside him; and after a time he asked what they were there for. Mr. Dayne seemed less and less disposed for conversation. So it was Sam who told, in a somewhat halting fashion, of the coming of the crows....

Pond, whom no one could have taken for a sentimentalist, made no comment whatever. Presently he felt Mr. Dayne’s eye upon him.

“Well, would it work out, do you think?”

The Director shook his head slightly, disclaiming authority. But after a time he said:

“Not as long as men’ll try it only once every two thousand years.”

The parson’s eyes dreamed off.

Page 193

“He believed in miracles. And so they were always happening to him.... Oh, it’s all so simple when you stop to think.”

Then there was silence and the creeping twilight. Sam O’Neill stood picking at a splotch on the ancient plaster, with strong, yellow-gloved hands. Mr. Dayne walked about, his arms crossed behind him. Upon Pond there came a sort of restlessness.

He said abruptly: “How long’ has Miss Heth been here?”

“Oh—a—little while,” said the parson, rousing.... “Long enough, no doubt.”

The dark-eyed Director was standing. The two men exchanged a look; they seemed to feel each other. Here was a matter with which the Labor Commissioner had nothing to do.

“Well, then,” said Pond, with a little intake of breath, “I’ll go in.”

The Director shut the door into the hall, took his hat from the chair. He crossed the bare waiting-room, and turned the knob of the frequented door into the office.

This door he opened, gently, just far enough to let himself in; he closed it at once behind him. Nevertheless, by the chance of their position, the other two saw, through the darkness of the room beyond, what was not meant for their eyes.

A simple scene, in all truth; none commoner in the world; it really did not matter who saw. Yet the two men in the waiting-room, beholding, turned away, and Sam O’Neill bit a groan through in the middle.

He had never understood his friend, but he had loved him in his way. Old memories twitched; his poise wavered. He lacked the parson’s inner supports. He paced about for some time, making little noises in his throat. And then he tried his voice on a question.

“Did you ever hear him speak of John the Baptist?”

Mr. Dayne halted, and looked.

And Sam O’Neill, with some difficulty and in his own way, told of V.V.’s creed about the Huns. Of how he had maintained that they needed awakening, nothing else, and were always ready and waiting for it, no matter how little they themselves knew that. And, finally, how he had said one day—in a phrase that had been brought flashing back over the months—that if a man but called to such as these in the right voice, he could not hide himself where they would not come to him on their knees....

Mr. Dayne had stood listening with a half-mystical look, a man groping for elusive truths. Now his fine composure seemed to cloud for a moment; but it shone out again, fair and strong. And presently, as he paced, he was heard humming again his strange paradoxical song, which he, a parson, seemed to lean upon, as a wounded man leans on his friend.

* * * * *

Her spirit returned to her body from the far countries, not without some pain of juncture. But there was no strangeness now in being in this room; none in finding Mr. Pond at her side, his saddened gaze upon her. Happen what might, nothing any more would ever seem strange....

Page 194

“Won’t you come with me now?”

She stood, whispering: “Come with you?”

And Pond’s strong heart turned a little when he saw her eyes, so circled, so dark with tears that were to come.

“Your cousins are waiting, aren’t they?... And don’t you think your father might need you?”

A little spasm distorted the lovely face, unveiled now.

She inclined her head. Pond walked away toward the door; stood there silently, drawing a finger over faded panels. Behind him was the absence of all sound: the wordlessness of partings that were final for this world....

She had seen in his great dignity the man who had given to the House of Heth the last full measure of his confidence. And it was as his little friend had said. He was beautiful with the best of all his looks; the look he had worn yesterday in the library, as he went to meet her poor father.

They had slain him, and yet he trusted.

No design of hers had led her alone beside this resting-place: that was chance, or it was God. But now it seemed that otherwise it would henceforward not have been bearable. For with this first near touch of death, there had come, strangely hand in hand, her first vision of the Internal. The look of this spirit was not toward time, and over the body of this death there had descended the robe of a more abundant Life.

So she turned quickly and came away....

She was outside now. The door was shut behind. And she was walking with Mr. Pond down the corridor, which was so long, echoing so emptily. She became aware that her knees were trembling. And Corinne’s fear now was hers.

She desired to be at once where no one could see her. But at the head of the grand stairway, in the desolating loneliness, Mr. Pond stopped walking. And then he held a hand of hers between two of his; pressed it hard, released it.

He was speaking in a voice that seemed vaguely unlike his own.

“It’s hard for you—for your father—for all of us down here. His life was needed ... wonderfully, for such a boy. And yet.... How could a man wish it better with himself? He wouldn’t, that I’m sure of.... Gave away his life every day, and at the end flung it all

out at once, to save a factory negro. Don't you know that if he'd lived a thousand years, he could never have put one touch to that?"

Cally said unsteadily: "I know that's true...."

She wished to go on; but the Director was speaking again, hurriedly:

"And you mustn't think that a blow on the head can bring it all to an end. If I know anything, his story will be often told. People that you and I will never know, will know of this, and it will help them—when their pinch comes. There's no measuring the value of a great example. When it strikes, you can feel the whole line lift...."

And then he added, in a let-down sort of way: "Freest man I ever saw."

Page 195

There was no reply to make to these things. They went down the stairs together. Halfway down, the man spoke again:

“In the little while I’ve been here, I’ve seen and heard a great deal. Some day you must let me tell you—how much there is down here to keep his memory green.”

The stairs were long. A kind of terror was growing within her. She would go to pieces before she reached the bottom. But that peril passed; and very near now was the waiting car, and merciful shelter....

They crossed, amid springing memories, the old court where, one rainy afternoon, there had happened what had turned her life thenceforward. Then they were safely through the door, and came out upon the portico, into the last light of the dying afternoon. And here, above all else that she felt, she encountered a dim surprise.

When she had passed this way a little while before, it was as if all power of feeling had been frozen in her. Sights and sounds were not for her. So now the sudden spectacle that met her eyes came as a large vague confusion.

The shabby street was black with people.

Her affliction had been so supremely personal, her sense of this man’s tragic solitariness in the world so overwhelming, that she could not at once take in the meaning of what she saw. She must have faltered to a pause. And she heard Pond’s voice, so strangely gentle:

“You see he was much loved here.”

Her eyes went once over the dingy street, the memorable scene. Thought shook through her in poignant pictures.... Herself, one day, prostrated by calamity on calamity; and in the little island-circle where she had spent her life, not one heart that had taken her sorrow as its own. And beside that picture, this: a great company, men and women, old and young, silent beneath a window: and somewhere among them the sounds of persistent weeping....

And Cally seemed suddenly to see what had been hidden from her before. If he was much loved, it was because he had loved much.

Yet her confusion must have lingered. Was it so, indeed? Many, so many, to compensate his loneliness? It seemed to be important to understand clearly; and she turned her veiled face toward Pond, and spoke indistinctly:

“All these.... Are they all ... his friends?”

There sprang a light into the Director’s hawk-eyes, changing his whole look wonderfully.

“They’re his mother,” he said, “and his brothers and his sisters....”