

BY WALTER BESANT.

Continued from Sunday, October 11.

"That, too, I will tell you afterward." Lotty leaned her cheek upon her hands and looked at her husband thoughtfully.

"Let us be plain, Joe." "You can never be plain, my dear," he replied, with the smile of a lover, not a husband; never in your husband's eyes; not even in Lotty's.

But she was not to be won by flattery. "Fine words," she said, "fine words. What do they amount to? Oh, Joe, little I thought when you came along with your beautiful promises what sort of a man I was going to marry."

"A very good sort of a man," he said. "You've got a jolly sailor—an officer and a gentleman. Come now, what have you got to say to this? Can't you be satisfied with an officer and a gentleman?"

He drew himself up to his full height. Well, he was a handsome fellow; there was no denying it.

"Good looks and fine words," his wife went on. "Well, and now I've got to keep you, and if you could make me sing in a dozen halls every night you would, and spend the money on yourself—joyfully you would."

"We would spend it together, my dear. Don't turn rusty, Lotty."

He was not a bad-tempered man, and this kind of talk did not anger him at all. So long as his wife worked hard and brought in the coin for him to spend, what mattered for a few words now and then? Besides, he wanted her assistance.

"What are you driving at?" he went on. "I show you a bit of my hand, and you begin talking round and round. Look here, Lotty, here's a splendid chance for us. I must have a woman's help. I would rather have your help than any other woman's—yes, than any other woman's in the world I would indeed. If you won't help me, why then, of course, I must go to some other woman."

His wife gasped and choked. She knew already, after only five weeks' experience, how bad a man he was—how unscrupulous, false and treacherous, how low and selfish.

But, after a fashion, she loved him; after a woman's fashion, she was madly jealous of him. Another woman! And only the other night she had seen him giving brandy and soda to one of the music hall ballet girls. Another woman!

"If you do, Joe," she said, "oh, if you do—I will kill her and you too!"

He laughed. "If I do, my dear, you don't think I shall be such a fool as to tell you who she is. Do you suppose that no woman has ever fallen in love with me before you? But then, my pretty, you see, I don't talk about them; and you suppose—oh, Lotty, are you such a fool as to suppose that you are the first girl I ever fell in love with?"

"What do you want me to do? Tell me again."

"I have told you already. I want you to become, for the time, the daughter of the man who died in America; you will claim your inheritance; I will provide you with all the papers; I will stand by you; I will back you up with such a story as will disarm all suspicion. That is all."

"Yes, I understand. Haven't people been sent to prison for less, Joe?"

"Foolish people have. Not people who are well advised and under good management. Mind you, this business is under my direction. I am boss."

"Mind you, this business is under my direction. I am boss."

She made no reply, but took her candle and went off to bed.

In the dead of night she awakened her husband.

"Joe," she said, "is it true that you know another girl who would do this for you?"

"More than one, Lotty," he replied, this man of resource, although he was only half awake. "More than one. A great many more. Half-a-dozen, I know, at least."

She was silent. Half an hour afterwards she woke up again.

"Joe," she said, "I've made up my mind. You shan't say that I refused to do for you what any other girl in the world would have done."

As a tempter, it will be seen that Joe was unsurpassed.

It was now a week since he had received, carefully wrapped in wool, and deposited in a wooden-box dispatched by post, a key, newly made. It was, also, very nearly a week since he had used that key. It was used during Mr. Emblem's hour for tea, while James waited and watched outside in an agony of terror. But Joe did not find what he wanted. There was in the safe one or two ledgers, a banker's book, a check-book, and a small quantity of money. But there were not any records at all of moneys invested. There were no railway certificates, water-work shares, transfers, or notes of stocks, mortgages, loans, or anything at all. The only thing that he saw was a roll of papers tied up with red tape. On the roll was written: "For Iris. To be given to her on her twenty-first birthday."

"What the deuce is this, I wonder?" Joe took this out and looked at it suspiciously. "Can he be going to give her all his money before he dies? Is he going to make her his heir at once?" The thought was so exasperating that he slipped the roll into his pocket. "At all events," he said, "she shan't have them until I have read them first. I dare say they won't be missed for a day or two."

Joe calculated that he could read and master the contents that night, and put back the papers in the safe in the morning while James was opening the shop.

"There's nothing, James," he whispered, as he went out, the safe being locked again. "There's nothing at all. Look here, my lad, you must try another way of finding out where the money is."

"I wish I was sure that he hasn't carried off something in his pocket," James murmured.

Joe spent the whole evening alone, con-

trary to his usual practice, which was, as we have seen, to spend it at a certain music hall. He read the papers over and over again.

"I wish," he said at length, "I wish I had known this only two months ago. I wish I had paid more attention to Iris. What a dreadful thing it is to have a grandfather who keeps secrets from his grandson! What a game we might have had over this job! What a game we might have still had!"

And here he stopped, for the first germ or conception of a magnificent coup dawned upon him, and fairly dazzled him so that his eyes saw a bright light and nothing else.

"If Lotty would," he said, "but I am afraid she won't hear of it." He sprang to his feet and caught sight of his own face in the looking-glass over the fireplace. He smiled. "I will try," he said, "I think I know, by this time, how to get round most of 'em. Once they get to feel there are other women in the world besides themselves, they're pretty easily worked. I will try."

One has only to add to the revelations already made that Joe paid a second visit to the shop, this time early in the morning. The shutters were only just taken down. James was going about with that remarkable watering-pot only used in shops which has a little stream running out of it, and Mr. Emblem was up stairs slowly shaving and dressing in his bedroom. He walked in, nodded to his friend the assistant, opened the safe, and put back the roll.

"Now," he murmured, "if the old man has really been such a dunder-headed pig as not to open the packet all these years, what the devil can he know? The name is different; he hasn't got any clue to the will; he hasn't got the certificates of his daughter's marriage, or of the child's baptism—both in the real name. He hasn't got anything. As for the girl here, Iris, having the same Christian name, that's nothing. I suppose there is more than one woman with such a fool of a name as that about in the world."

"Foxy," he said cheerfully, "have you found anything yet about the investments? Oh, isn't it! Nothing in the safe at all. You can have your key back."

He tossed him the key carelessly and went away.

The question of his grandfather's savings was growing insignificant beside this great and splendid prize which lay waiting for him. What could the savings be! At best a few thousands; the slowly saved thrift of fifty years; nobody knew better than Joe himself how much his own profligacies had cost his grandfather; a few thousands, and those settled on his cousin Iris, so that, to get his share, he would have to try every kind of persuasion unless he could get up a case for law. But the other thing—why, it was nearly all personal estate, so far as he could learn by the will, and he had read it over and over again in the room at the Somerset House, with the long table in it, and the watchful man who won't let any body copy anything. What a shame, he thought, not to let will be copied! Personally sworn under a hundred and twenty thousand, all in Three Per Cents, and devised to a certain young lady, the testator's ward, in trust, for the testator's son, or his heirs, when he or they should present themselves. Meantime, the ward was to receive for her own use and benefit, year by year, the whole income.

"It is unfortunate," said Joe, "we can't come down upon her for arrears. Still, there's an income, a steady income, of £3,000 a year when the son's heirs present themselves. I should like to call myself a solicitor, but that kite won't fly. I'm afraid Lotty must be the sole heiress. Dressed quiet, without any powder, and her fringe brushed flat, she'd pass for a lady anywhere! Perhaps it's lucky, after all, that I married her, though if I had had the good sense to make up to Iris, who's a deuced sight prettier, she'd have kept me going almost as well with her pupils, and set me right with the old man, and handed me over this magnificent haul for a finish. If only the old man hadn't broken the seals and read the papers!"

The old man had not, and Joe's fears were, therefore, groundless.

CHAPTER V. AS A BROTHER.

Arnold immediately began to use the privilege accorded to him with a large and liberal interpretation. If, he argued, a man is to be treated as a brother, there should be the immediate concession of the exchange of Christian names, and he should be allowed to call as often as he pleased. Naturally he began by trying to read the secret of a life self-contained, so dull, and yet so happy, so strange to his experience.

"Is this, Iris," he asked, "all your life? Is there nothing more?"

"No," she said; "I think you have seen all. In the morning I have my correspondence; in the afternoon I do my sewing. I play a little, I read, or I walk, sometimes by myself, and sometimes with Lala Roy; in the evening I play again, or I read again, or I work at the mathematics, while my grandfather and Lala Roy have their chess. We used to go to the theatre sometimes, but of late my grandfather has not gone. At ten we go to bed. That is all my life."

"But, Iris, have you no friends at all, and no relations? Are there no girls of your own age who come to see you?"

"No, not one; I have a cousin, but he is not a good man at all. His father and mother are in Australia. When he comes here, which is very seldom, my grandfather falls ill only with thinking about him and looking at him. But I have no other relations, because, you see, I do not know who my father's people were."

"Then," said Arnold, "you may be countess in your own right; you may have any number of rich people and nice people for your cousins. Do you not sometimes think of that?"

"No," said Iris; "I never think about things impossible."

"If I were you, I should go about the streets, and walk round the picture galleries looking for a face like your own. There cannot be many. Let me draw your face, Iris, and then we will send it to the governor, and label it, 'Wanted, this young lady's cousin.' You must have cousins, if you could only find them out."

"I suppose I must. But what if they should turn out to be rough and disagreeable people?"

"Your cousins could not be disagreeable, Iris," said Arnold.

She shook her head.

"One thing I should like," she replied. "It would be to find that my cousins, if I have any, are clever people—astronomers, mathematicians, great philosophers, and writers. But what nonsense it is to even talk of such things; I am quite alone, except for my grandfather and Lala Roy."

"And they are old," murmured Arnold.

"Do not look at me with such pity," said the girl. "I am very happy. I have my own occupation, I am independent. I have my work to fill my mind, and I have these two old gentlemen to care for and think of. They have taken so much care of me that I ought to think of nothing else but their comfort; and then there are the books down stairs—thousands of beautiful old books always within my reach."

"But you must have some companions, if only to talk and walk with."

"Why, the books are my companions, and then Lala Roy goes for walks with me; and as for talking, I think it is much more pleasant to think."

Where do you walk?" "There is Battersea Park; there are the squares; and, if you take an omnibus, there are the Gardens and Hyde Park."

"But never alone, Iris?" "Oh, yes, I am often alone. Why not?"

"I suppose," said Arnold, shrugging the question, because this is a civilized country, and, in fact, why not? "I suppose that it is your work which keeps you from feeling life dull and monotonous."

"No life," she said, looking as wise as Newton, if Newton was ever young and handsome—"no life can be dull when one is thinking about mathematics all day. Do you study mathematics?"

"No; I was at Oxford, you know."

"Then perhaps you prefer metaphysics! Though Lala Roy says that the true metaphysics, which he has tried to teach me, can only be reached by the Hindu intellect."

"No, indeed; I have never read any metaphysics whatever. I have only got the English intellect." This he said with intent sardonic, but Iris failed to understand it so, and thought it was meant for a commendable humility.

"Physical science, perhaps?" "No, Iris. Philosophy, mathematics, physics, metaphysics, or science of any kind have I never learned, except only the science of heraldry, which you have taught me, with a few other things."

"Oh! She wondered how a man could exist at all without learning those things. 'Not any science at all! How can any one live without some science?'"

"I knew very well," he said, "that as soon as I was found out I should be despised."

"Oh, no, not despised. But it seems such a pity."

There is another kind of life, Iris, which you do not know. You must let me teach you. It is the life of Art. If you would only condescend to show the least curiosity about me, Iris, I would try to show you something of the art life."

"How can I show curiosity about you, Arnold? I feel none."

"No; that is just the thing which shames me. I have felt the most lively curiosity about you, and I have asked you thousands of impertinent questions."

"Not impertinent, Arnold. If you want to ask any more, pray do. I dare say you cannot understand my simple life."

"And you ask me nothing at all about myself. It isn't fair, Iris."

"Why should I? I know you already." "You know nothing at all about me."

"Oh, yes, I know you very well indeed. I knew you before you came here. You showed me yourself in your letters. You are exactly like the portrait I drew of you. I never thought, for instance, that you were an old gentleman, as you thought me."

He laughed. It was a new thing to see Iris using, even gently, the dainty weapons of satire.

"But you do not know what I am, or what is my profession, or anything at all about me."

"No, I do not care to know. All that is not part of yourself. It is outside you. And because you thought you knew me from those letters, you suffer me to come here and be your disciple still! Yet you gave me back my letters!"

"That was because they were written to me under a wrong impression."

"Will you have them back again?" She shook her head.

"I know them all by heart," she said simply.

There was not the slightest sign of coquetry or flattery in her voice, or in her eyes, which met his look with clear and steady gaze.

"I cannot ask you to read my portrait to me as you draw it from those pictures."

"Why not?" She began to read him his portrait as readily as if she were stating the conclusion of a problem. "I saw that you were young and full of generous thoughts; sometimes you were indignant with things as they are, but generally you laughed at them and accepted them. It is, it seems, the nature of your friends to laugh a great deal at things which they ought to remedy if they could, not laugh at them. I thought that you wanted some strong stimulus to work; anybody could see that you were a man of kindly nature and good-breeding. You were careful not to offend by anything that you wrote, and I was certain that you were a man of honor. I trusted you, Arnold, before I saw your face, because I knew your soul."

"Trust me still, Iris," he said in rather a husky voice.

"Of course I did not know, and never thought, what sort of a man you were to look at. Yet I ought to have known that you were handsome. I should have guessed that from the very tone of your letters. A hunchback or a cripple could not have written in so light-hearted a strain, and I should have discovered, if I had thought of such a thing, that you were very well satisfied with your personal appearance. Young men should always be that, at least, if only to give their confidence."

"Oh, Iris—oh! Do you really think me conceited?"

"Did not say that. I only said you were satisfied with yourself. That, I understand now, was clear, from many little natural touches in your letters."

"What else did you learn?"

"Oh, a great deal—much more than I can tell you. I knew that you go into society, and I learned from you what society means; and though you tried to be sarcastic, I understood easily that you liked social pleasure."

"Was I sarcastic?"

"Was it not sarcastic to tell me how the fine ladies, who affect so much enthusiasm for art, go to see the galleries on the private day, and are never seen in them again? Was it not sarcastic—"

"Spare me, Iris. I will never do it again. And knowing so much, do you, not desire to know more?"

"No, Arnold. I am not interested in anything else."

"But my position, my profession, my people—are you not curious to know them?"

"No. They are not you. They are accidents of yourself."

"Philosopher! But you must know more about me. I told you I was an artist. But you have never inquired whether I was a great artist or a little one."

"You are still a little artist," she said. "I know that without being told. But perhaps you may become great when you learn to work seriously."

"I have been lazy," he replied with something like a blush, "but that is all over now. I am going to work. I will give up society. I will take my profession seriously, if only you will encourage me."

Did he mean what he said? When he came away he used at this period to ask himself that question, and was astonished at the length he had gone. With any other girl in the world he would have been taken at his word, and either encouraged to go on, or snubbed on the spot. But Iris received these advances as if they were a confession of weakness.

"Why do you want me to encourage you?" she asked. "I know nothing about art. Can't you encourage yourself, Arnold?"

"Iris, I must tell you something more about myself. Will you listen for a moment? Well, I am the son of a clergyman who now holds a colonial appointment. I have got the usual number of brothers and sisters, who are doing the usual things. I will not bore you with details about them."

"No," said Iris, "please do not."

"I am the adopted son, or ward, or what-

ever you please, of a certain cousin. She is a single lady with a great income, which she promises to bequeath to me in the future. In the meantime I am to have whatever I want. Do you understand the position, Iris?"

"Yes, I think so. It is interesting, because it shows why you will never be a great artist. But it is very sad."

"A man may rise above his conditions," Iris said Arnold merrily.

"No," she went on; "it is only the poor men who do anything good. Lala Roy says so."

"I will pretend to be poor—indeed, I am poor. I have nothing. If it were not for my cousin I could not even profess to follow art."

"What a pity," she said, "that you are rich! Lala Roy was rich once."

Arnold repressed an inclination to desire that Lala Roy might be kept out of the conversation.

"But he gave up all his wealth and has been happy and a philosopher ever since."

"I can't give up my wealth, Iris, because I haven't got any—I owe my cousin everything. But for her I should never even have known you."

He watched her at her work in the morning when she sat patiently answering questions, working out problems and making papers. She showed him the letters of her pupils, exacting, excusing, petulant—sometimes dissatisfied and even ill-tempered. He watched her in the afternoon while she sewed or read. In the evening he sat with her while the two old men played their game of chess. Regularly every evening at half-past nine the Bengalee checked Mr. Emblem. Up to that hour he amused him-



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self with his opponent, formed ingenious combinations, watched openings, and gradually cleared the board until he found himself as the hour of half-past nine drew near, able to propose a simple problem to his own mind, such as, "White moves first, to mate in three, four, or five moves," and then he proceeded to solve that problem, and checked his adversary.

No one, not even Iris, knew how Lala Roy lived, or what he did in the daytime. It was rumored that he had been seen at Simpson's, in the Strand, but this report wanted confirmation. He had lived in Mr. Emblem's second floor for twenty years; he always paid his bills with regularity, and his long spare figure and white moustache and red-veined forehead among the old veterans of the hospital.

"It is quiet for you in the evenings," said Arnold.

"I play to them sometimes. They like to hear me play during the game. Look at them."

She sat down and played. She had a delicate touch and played soft music, such as sonatas, but she did not play grand, and she did not play the old masters. Arnold watched her, not the old man. How was that refinement, grace, self-possession, manners and the culture of a lady, could be found in one who knew no ladies! But then Arnold did not know Lala Roy nor did he understand the old bookseller.

"You are always wondering about me," she said, talking while she played; "I see it in your eyes. Can you not take me as I am, without thinking why I am different from other girls? Of course I am different, because I know none of them."

"I wish they were all like you," he said.

"No; that would be a great pity. You want girls who understand your own life, and can enter into your pursuits—you want companions who can talk to you; go back to them, Arnold, as soon as you are tired of coming here."

And yet his instinct was right which told him that the girl was not a coquette. She had no thought—not the least thought—as yet that anything was possible beyond the existing friendship. It was pleasant, but Arnold would get tired of her, and go back to his own people. Then he would remain in her memory as a study of character. This she did not exactly formulate, but she had that feeling. Every woman makes a study of character about every man in whom she becomes ever so little interested. But we must not get conceited, my brothers, over this fact. The converse, unhappy, does not hold true. Very few men ever study the character of a woman at all. Either they fall in love with her before they have had time to make more than a sketch, or they do not fall in love with her at all; and in the latter case it hardly seems worth while to follow up a first rough draft.

"Checkmate," said Lala Roy.

The game was finished and the evening over.

"Would you like," he said, another evening, "to see my studio, or do you consider my studio outside myself?"

"I should very much like to see an artist's studio," she replied with her usual frankness, leaving it an open question whether she would not be equally pleased to see any other studio.

She came, however, accompanied by Lala Roy, who had never been in a studio before, and indeed had never looked at a picture, except with the contemptuous glance which the philosopher bestows upon the follies of mankind. Yet he came, because Iris asked him. Arnold's studio is one of the smallest of those in the street. Of course it is built of red brick, and of course it has a noble staircase and a beautiful painting room or studio proper all set about with bits of tapestry, armor, pictures, and china, besides the tools and properties of the craft. He had portfolios full of sketches; against the wall stood pictures, finished and unfinished; on an easel was a half-painted picture representing a group taken from a modern novel. Most painters only draw scenes from two novels—the Vicar of Wakefield and Don Quixote; but Arnold knew more. The central figure was a girl, quite unfinished—in fact, barely sketched in.

Iris looked at everything with the interest which belongs to the new and unexpected.

Arnold began to show the pictures in the portfolios. There were sketches of peasant life in Norway and on the Continent; there were landscapes, quaint old houses and castles; there were ships and ports; and there were heads—hundreds of heads.

"I said you might be a great artist," said Iris. "I am sure now that you will be if you choose."

"Thank you, Iris. It is the greatest compliment you could pay me."

"And what is this?" she was before the easel on which stood the unfinished picture.

"It is a scene from a novel. But I cannot get the principal faces. Some of the models are half good enough. I want a sweet face, a serious face, a face with deep, beautiful eyes. Iris—it was a sudden impulse, an inspiration—'let me put your face there. Give me my first commission.'"

She blushed deeply. All these drawings, the multitudinous faces and heads and figures in the portfolio were a revelation to her. And just at the very moment when she discovered that Arnold was one of those who worship beauty—a thing she had never before understood—he told her that her face was so beautiful that he must put it in his picture.

"Oh, Arnold," she said, "my face would be out of place in that picture."

"Would it! Please sit down, and let me make a sketch."

He seized his crayons and began rapidly. "What do you say, Lala Roy?" he asked by way of diversion.

"The gifts of the understanding," said the sage, "are the treasures of the Lord; and He appointeth to every one his portion."

"Thank you," replied Arnold. "Very true and very apt, I'm sure. Iris, please, your face turned just a little. So, ah, if I can but do some measure of justice to your eyes!"

When Iris went away there was for the first time the least touch of restraint or self-consciousness in her. Arnold felt it. She showed it in her eyes and in the touch of her fingers when he took her hand at parting. It was then for the first time also that Arnold discovered a truth of overwhelming importance. Every new fact—everything which cannot be disputed or denied, is, we all know, of the most enormous importance. He discovered no less a truth than that he was in love with Iris. So important is this truth to a young man that it reduces the countless myriads of the world to a single pair—himself and another; it converts the most arid waste of streets into an Eden; and it binds the eyes to ambition, riches and success. Arnold sat down and reasoned out this truth. He said coldly and "squarely":

"This is a girl whom I have known only a fortnight or so; she lives over a second-hand book shop; she is a teacher by profession; she knows none of the ways of society; she would doubtless be guilty of all kinds of queer things, if she were suddenly introduced to good people; probably she would never learn our manners; with more to the same effect, which may be reasonably omitted. Then his conscience woke up, and said quite simply: "Arnold, you are a liar." Conscience does sometimes call hard names. She is feminine, and therefore privileged to call hard names. Else we should sometimes kick and belabor Conscience. "Arnold, don't talk more lies. You have been grace, all learning to know Iris, through the wisest and sweetest letters that were ever written, for a whole year. You gradually began to know her, in fact, when you first began to interlard your letters with concealed revelations about yourself. You knew her to be sympathetic, quick, and of a most kind and tender heart. You are quite sure, though you try to disguise the fact, that she is as honest as the day, and as true as steel. As for her not being a lady, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for even thinking such a thing. Has she not been tenderly brought up by two old men who are full of honor, and truth, and all the simple virtues? Does she not look, move, and speak like the most gracious lady in the land?"

"Like a goddess," Arnold confessed—"As for the ways and talk of society, what are these worth! and cannot they be acquired! And what are her manners save those of the most perfect refinement and purity? The most far Conscience. Then Arnold, or Arnold's secret advocate diabolical, began upon another and quite different line. "She must have schemed at the outset to get me into her net; she is a Siren; she assumes the disguise of innocence and ignorance the better to beguile and to deceive. She has gone home to-day elated because she thinks she has landed a gentleman."

Conscience said nothing; there are some things to which Conscience has no reply in words to offer; yet Conscience pointed to the portrait of the girl, and bade the most unworthy of all lovers look upon even his own poor and meagre representation of her eyes and face, and ask whether such blasphemies could ever be forgiven.

After a self-abasement, which for shame's sake we must pass over, the young man felt happier.

Henry the Second felt much the same satisfaction the morning after his scourging at the hands of the monks, who were as amuseful as they were vindictive.

CHAPTER VI. COUSIN CLARA.

That man who spends his days in painting a girl's portrait, in talking to her, in gazing upon her unfinished portraits when she is not with him, and occupies his thoughts during the watches of the night in thinking about her, is, perforce, near to taking the last and fatal step. Flight for such a man is the only thing left, and he so seldom thinks of flight until it is too late.

Arnold was at this point.

"I am possessed by this girl," he might have said had he put his thoughts into words. "I am haunted by her eyes; her voice lingers on my ears; I dream of her face; the touch of her fingers is like the touch of an electric battery." What symptoms are these, so common that one is almost ashamed to write them down, but the infallible symptoms of love! And yet he hesitated, not because he doubted himself any longer, but because he was not independent, and such an engagement might deprive him at one stroke of all that he possessed. Might it certainly would. Yes; the new and beautiful studio, all the things in it, all his prospects for the future, would have to be given up. "She is worth more than that," said Arnold, "and I should find my work somehow.