

FAWCETT EDGAR

THE ADVENTURES OF A
WIDOW: A NOVEL

Edgar Fawcett

The Adventures of a Widow: A Novel

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The Adventures of a Widow: A Novel / E. Fawcett — «Public Domain»,

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I

It is not long ago that the last conservative resident of Bond Street, proud of his ancient possessorship and no doubt loving the big brick structure with arched doorway and dormer windows in which he first saw the light, felt himself relentlessly swept from that interesting quarter by the stout besom of commerce. Interesting the street really is for all to whom old things appeal with any charm. It is characteristic of our brilliant New York, however, that few antiquarian feet tread her pavements, and that she is too busy with her bustling and thrifty present to reflect that she has ever reached it through a noteworthy past. Some day it will perhaps be recorded of her that among all cities she has been the least preservative of tradition and memorial. The hoary antiquity of her transatlantic sisters would seem to have made her unduly conscious of her own youth. She has so long looked over seas for all her history and romance, that now, when she can safely boast two solid centuries of age, the habit yet firmly clings, and she cares as little for the annals of her fine and stately growth as though, like Troy, she had risen, roof and spire, to the strains of magic melody.

It might be of profit, and surely it would be of pleasure, were she to care more for the echoes of those harsh and sometimes tragic sounds that have actually blent their serious music with her rise. As it is, she is rich in neglected memories; she has tombs that dumbly reproach her ignoring eye; she has nooks and purlieus that teem with reminiscence and are silent testimonials of her indifference. Her Battery and her Bowling Green, each bathed in the tender glamour of Colonial association, lie frowned upon by the grim scorn of recent warehouses and jeered at by the sarcastic shriek of the neighboring steam-tug. She can easily guide you to the modern clamors of her Stock-Exchange; but if you asked her to show you the graves of Stuyvesant and Montgomery she might find the task a hard one, though thousands of her citizens daily pass and re-pass these hallowed spots. Boston, with its gentle ancestral pride, might well teach her a lesson in retrospective self-esteem. Her own harbor, like that of Boston, has had its "tea-party," and yet one whose anniversary now remains a shadow. On Golden Hill, in her own streets, the first battle of our Revolution was fought, the first blood in the cause of our freedom was spilled; yet while Boston stanchly commemorates its later "massacre," what tribute of oratory, essay or song has that other momentous contest received? This metropolitan disdain of local souvenir can ill excuse itself on the plea of intolerance toward provincialism; for if the great cities of Europe are not ashamed to admit themselves once barbaric, Hudson in fray or traffic with the swarthy Manhattans, or old Van Twiller scowling at the anathemas of Bogardus, holds at least a pictorial value and significance.

Bond Street has always been but a brief strip of thoroughfare, running at right angles between the Bowery and Broadway. Scarcely more than thirty years ago it possessed the quietude and dignity of a patrician domain; it was beloved of our Knickerbocker social element; it was the tranquil stronghold of caste and exclusiveness. Its births, marriages and deaths were all touched with a modest distinction. Extravagance was its horror and ostentation its antipathy. The cheer of its entertainments would often descend to lemonade and sponge-cake, and rarely rise above the luxury of claret-punch and ice-cream. Its belles were of demurer type than the brisk-paced ladies of this period, and its beaux paid as close heed to the straight line in morals as many of their successors now bestow upon it in the matter of hair-parting. Bond Street was by no means the sole haunt of the aristocracy, but it was very representative, very important, very select. There was even a time when to live there at all conferred a certain patent of respectability. It was forgiven you that your daughter had married an obscure Smith, or that your son had linked his lot with an undesirable Jones, if you had once come permanently

to dwell there. The whole short, broad street was superlatively genteel. Nothing quite describes it like that pregnant little word. It dined at two o'clock; it had "tea" at six; its parties were held as dissipated if they broke up after midnight; its young men "called" on its young women of an evening with ceremonious regularity, never at such times donning the evening-coat and the white neck-tie which now so widely obtain, but infallibly wearing these on all occasions of afternoon festivity with an unconcern of English usage that would keenly shock many of their descendants.

But by degrees the old order changed. Commerce pushed northward with relentless energy. Its advance still left Bond Street uninvaded, but here and there the roomy brick dwellings received distinctly plebeian inmates. One night, in this street formerly so dedicated to the calm of refinement, a frightful murder occurred. No one who lived in New York at that time can fail to remember the Burdell assassination. It was surrounded by all the most melodramatic luridness of commission. Its victim was a dentist, slaughtered at midnight with many wounds from an unknown hand. The mysterious deed shook our whole city with dismay. For weeks it was a topic that superseded all others. To search through old newspapers of the excited days that followed is to imagine oneself on the threshold of a thrilling tale, in which the wrong culprits are arraigned and the real offender hides himself behind so impregnable an ambush that nothing but a final chapter can overthrow it. Yet in this ghastly affair of the stabbed dentist a protracted trial resulted in a tame acquittal and no more. The story ended abruptly and midway. It lies to-day as alluring material for the writer of harrowing fiction. It still retains all the ghastly piquancy of an undiscovered crime.

The vast surrounding populace of New York have long ago learned to forget it, but there would be truth in the assertion that Bond Street recalls it still. Its garish publicity scared away the last of her fine-bred denizens. The retreat was haughty and gradual, but it is now absolute. Where Ten Eyck and Van Horn had engraved their names in burly letters on sheeny door-plates, you may see at present the flaunting signs of a hair-dresser, a beer-seller, a third-rate French *restaurateur*, a furrier, a flower-maker, and an intercessor between despairing authors and obdurate publishers. The glory of Bond Street has departed. Its region has become lamentably "down town." The spoilers possess it with undisputed rule. It is in one sense a melancholy ruin, in another a sprightly transformation.

But several years before its decadence turned unargued fact (and now we near a time that almost verges upon the present), Mr. Hamilton Varick, a gentleman well past fifty, brought into perhaps the most spacious mansion of the street a bride scarcely eighteen. Mr. Varick had lived abroad for many years, chiefly in Paris. He was a tall, spare man, with a white jaunty mustache and a black eye full of fire. He was extremely rich, and unless remote relations were considered, heirless. It was generally held that he had come home to end his days after a life of foreign folly and gallantry. This may at first have seemed wholly true, but it also occurred that he had chosen to end them in the society of a blooming young wife.

His Bond Street house, vacant for years, suddenly felt the embellishing spell of the upholsterer. Mr. Varick had meanwhile dropped into the abodes of old friends not seen in twenty years, had shaken hands, with a characteristic lightsome cordiality, right and left, had beamingly taken upon his lap the children of mothers and fathers who were once his youthful comrades in dance and rout, had reminded numerous altered acquaintances who he was, had been reminded in turn by numerous other altered acquaintances who they were, had twisted his white mustache, had talked with airy patriotism about getting back to die in one's native land, had deplored his long absence from the dear scenes of youth, had regretted secretly his transpontine Paris, had murmured his bad, witty French *mots* to whatever matron would hear them, had got himself re-made a member of the big, smart Metropolitan Club which he thought a mere tiresome sort of parochial tavern when he last left it, and had finally amazed everyone by marrying the young and lovely Miss Pauline Van Corlear.

Pauline herself had very little to do with the whole arrangement. She was the only child of a widowed mother who had long ago designed to marry her notably. Mrs. Van Corlear lived upon a very meagre income, and had been an invalid since Pauline was eight. But she had educated her

daughter with a good deal of patient care, and had ultimately, at the proper age, relegated her to the chaperonage of a more prosperous sister, who had launched her forth into society with due *élan*. Pauline was not a good match in the mercenary sense; she was perfectly well aware of the fact; she had been brought up to understand it. But she was fair to see, and perhaps she understood this a little too well.

New York was then what so many will remember it to have been about twelve years ago. The civil war had left few traces of disaster; it was the winter of seventy-one. Wall Street was in a hey-day of hazardous prosperity; sumptuous balls were given by cliques of the most careful entertainers; a number of ladies who had long remained unfashionable, yet who had preserved an inherited right to assert social claim when they chose, now came to the front. These matrons proved a strong force, and resisted in sturdy confederacy all efforts of outsiders to break their dainty ranks. They shielded under maternal wings a delightful bevy of blooming young maidens, among whom was Pauline Van Corlear.

It was a season of amusing conflict. Journalism had not yet learned to fling its lime-light of notoriety upon the doings and mis-doings of private individuals. Young girls did not wake then, as now, on the morning after a ball, to read (or with jealous heart-burning *not* to read) minute descriptions of their toilets on the previous night. The "society column" of the New York newspaper was still an unborn abomination. Had this not been the case, a great deal of pungent scandal might easily have found its way into print. The phalanx of assertive matrons roundly declared that they had found society in a deplorable condition. The balls, receptions and dinners were all being given by a horde of persons without grandfathers. The reigning belles were mostly a set of loud, rompish girls, with names that rang unfamiliarly. The good old people had nearly all been drowsing inactive during several winters; one could hardly discover an Amsterdam, a Spuytenduyvil, a Van Schuylkill, among this unpleasant rabble. There had been quite too many of these spurious pretenders. Legitimacy must uplift its debased standards.

Legitimacy did so, and with a will. Some very fine and spacious mansions in districts bordering or approximate to Washington Square were hospitably thrown open, besides others of a smarter but less time-honored elegance in "up-town" environments. The new set, as it was called, carried things by storm. They were for the most part very rich people, and they spent their wealth with a lavish freedom that their lineage saved from the least charge of vulgarity. No display of money is ever considered vulgar when lineage is behind it. If you are unblessed with good descent you must air your silver dishes cautiously and heed well the multiplicity of your viands; for though your cook possess an Olympian palate and your butler be the ex-adherent of a king, the accusation of bad taste hangs like a sword of threat in your banquet hall.

Among all the winsome *débutantes* of that season, Pauline Van Corlear was the most comely. She had a sparkling wit, too, that was at times mercilessly acute. Most of the young friends with whom she had simultaneously "come out" were heiresses of no mean consideration; but Pauline was so poor that an aunt would present her with a few dozens of gloves, a cousin would donate to her five or six fresh gowns, or perhaps one still more distant in kinship would supply her with boots and bonnets. The girl sensitively shrank, at first, from receiving these gifts; but her plaintive, faded mother, with her cough and querulous temper, would always eagerly insist upon their acceptance.

"Of course, my dear," Mrs. Van Corlear would say, in her treble pipe of a voice, while she rocked to and fro the great chair that bore her wasted, shawl-wrapped body – "of course it is quite right that your blood-relations should come forward. They all have plenty of money, and it would be dreadful if they let you go out looking shabby and forlorn. For my part, I'm only surprised that they don't do more."

"I expect nothing from them, mamma," Pauline would say, a little sadly.

"*Expect*, my dear? Of course you don't. But that doesn't alter the *obligation* on their part. Now please do not be obstinate; you know my neuralgia always gets worse when you're obstinate. You are very pretty – yes, a good deal prettier than Gertie Van Horn or Sallie Poughkeepsie, with all

their millions – and I haven't a doubt that before the winter is over you'll have done something really handsome for yourself. If you haven't, it will be your own fault."

Pauline clearly understood that to do something handsome for herself meant to marry a rich man. From a tender age she had been brought up to believe that this achievement was the goal of all hopes, desires and aims. Everybody expected it of her, as she grew prettier and prettier; everybody hinted or prophesied it to her long before she "came out." The little contracted and conventional world in which it was her misfortune to breathe and move, had forever dinned it into her ears until she had got to credit it as an article of necessitous faith. There are customs of the Orient that shock our Western intelligences when we read of women placidly accepting their tyrannies; but no almond-eyed daughter of pasha or vizier ever yielded more complaisantly to harem-discipline than Pauline now yielded to the cold, commercial spirit of the marriage decreed for her.

She was popular in society, notwithstanding her satiric turn. She always had a nosegay for the German, and a partner who had pre-engaged her. It was not seldom that she went to a ball quite laden with the floral boons of male admirers. Among these latter was her third cousin, then a gentleman of thirty, named Courtlandt Beekman. Courtlandt had been Pauline's friend from childhood. She had always been so fond of him that it had never occurred to her to analyze her fondness now, when they met under the festal glare of chandeliers instead of in her mother's plain, dull sitting-room. Nor had it ever occurred to any of her relations to matrimonially warn her against Courtlandt. He was such a nice, quiet fellow; naturally he was good to his little cousin; he was good to everybody, and now that Pauline had grown up and begun to go to places, his devotion took a brotherly form. Of course he was poor, and, if sensible, would marry rich. He had been going about for an age in "that other set." He knew the Briggs girls and the Snowe girls, and all the *parvenu* people who had been ruling at assemblies and dancing-classes during the dark interregnum. Perhaps he would marry a Briggs or a Snowe. If he did, it would be quite proper. He was Courtlandt Beekman, and his name would sanctify nearly any sort of Philistine bride. But no one ever dreamed of suspecting that he might want to marry the cousin, twelve years his junior, who had sat on his knee as a school-girl, munching the candies he used to bring her and often pelting him with childish railleries at the same ungrateful moment.

In person Courtlandt was by no means prepossessing. He had a tall, brawny figure, and a long, sallow face, whose unclassic irregularities might have seemed dull and heavy but for the brown eyes, lucid and variant, that enlivened it. He was a man of few words, but his silences, though sometimes important, were never awkward. No one accused him of stupidity, but no one had often connected him with the idea of cleverness. He produced the impression of being a very close observer, you scarcely knew why. Possibly it was because you felt confident that his silences were not mentally vacuous. He had gone among the gay throngs almost since boyhood; if he had not so persistently mingled with ladies (and in the main very sweet and cultured ones, notwithstanding the denunciations hurled against "that other set") it is probable that he would continuously have merited the title of ungainly and graceless. But ease and polish had come to him unavoidably; he was like some rough-shapen vessel that has fallen into the hands of the gilder and decorator. It would have been hard to pick a flaw in his manners, and yet his manners were the last thing that he made you think about. He was in constant social demand; his hosts and hostesses forgot how valuable to them he really was; he almost stood for that human miracle, a man without enemies. He made a kind of becoming background for nearly everybody; he had no axe to grind, no ladder to climb, no prize to win; he stood neither as debtor nor creditor toward society; he was, in a way, society itself. There were very few women who did not enjoy a chat with him *à deux*; and in all general conversation, though his attitude was chiefly that of listener, the talkers themselves were unaware how often they sought the response of his peculiar serious smile, or the intelligent gleam of his look.

Pauline had not been greatly troubled, on her advent among the merry-makers, with that timidity which is so keen a distress to so many callow maids. Bashfulness was not one of her weak points; she had borne the complex stare levelled at her in drawing-rooms with excellent *aplomb*.

Still, she could not help feeling that her kinsman, Courtlandt, had comfortably smoothed her path toward an individual and secure foothold. Those early intervals, dire to the soul of every novice like herself, when male adherence and escort failed through meagreness of acquaintanceship, Courtlandt had filled with the supporting relief of his presence and his attentions. There had been no *mauvais quart d'heure* in Pauline's evenings; her cousin had loyally saved her from even the momentary chagrin of being left without a courtier. Later on, his kindly vigilance had become needless; but he was always to be trusted, nevertheless, as a safeguard against possible desertion.

The occasion on which Mr. Hamilton Varick first saw Pauline was at a ball given in the February of her first season, two full months after she had modestly emerged with her little sisterhood of rosebud damsels. It was a very beautiful ball, given in a stately and lovely house adjacent to the Park, and by a lady now old and wrinkled, who had held her own, forty years ago, as a star in our then limited firmament of fashion. The dancers, among whom was her fair and smiling granddaughter of eighteen, chased the jolly hours in a spacious apartment, brilliant with prismatic candelabra and a lustrous floor of waxed wood. The rosy-and-white frescoes on the ceiling, the silver-fretted delicacy of frieze and cornice, the light, pure blues and pinks of tapestries, the airy and buoyant effects in tint and symmetry, made the whole quick-moving throng of revellers appear as if the past had let them live again out of some long-vanished French court-festival.

"These young people only need powdered heads to make it look as if Louis Quinze were entertaining us in dead earnest," said Mr. Varick, with his high-keyed, nonchalant voice. He addressed an elderly matron as he spoke, but he gave a covert glance at Pauline, to whom he had just received, through request, the honor of a presentation.

"I think it would be in very dead earnest if he did," said Pauline, speaking up with a gay laugh; and Mr. Varick laughed, too, relishing her pert joke. He paid her some gallant compliments as he stood at her side, though she thought them stiff and antique in sound, notwithstanding the foreign word or phrase that was so apt to tinge them. She found Mr. Varick pleasantest when he was asking after her sick mother, and telling her what New York gayeties used to be before the beginning of his long European absence. He had a tripping, lightsome mode of speech, that somehow suited the jaunty upward sweep of his white mustache. He would oscillate both hands in a graceful style as he talked. Elegant superficiality flowed from him without an effort. It needed no keenness to tell that he had been floating buoyantly on the top crest of the wave, and well amid its froth, all his life. He made no pretense to youth; he would, indeed, poke fun at his own seniority, with a relentless and breezy sort of melancholy.

"Did you ever hear of a French poet named Francois Villon," he said to Pauline, dropping into a seat at her side that some departure had just left vacant. "No, I dare say you've not. He was a dreadful chap – a kind of *polisson*, as we say, but he wrote the most charming ballads; I believe he was hanged afterward, or ought to have been – I forget which. One of his songs had a sad little refrain that ran thus: '*Où sont les neiges d'antan?*' – 'Where are the snows of last year?' you know. Well, mademoiselle – no, Miss Pauline, I mean – that line runs in my head to-night. *Ça me gêne* – it bothers me. I want to have the good things of youth back again. I come home to New York, and find my snow all melted. Everything is changed. I feel like a ghost – a merry old ghost, however. *Tenez* – just wait a bit. Do you think those nice young gentlemen will have anything to say to you after they have seen you a little longer in my company? I'm sure I have frightened four or five of them away. They're asking each other, now, who is that old *épouvantail* – what is the word? – scarecrow. Ah! *voilà* – here comes one much bolder than the rest. I will have mercy on him – and retire. But before my *départ* I have a favor to request of you. You will give mamma my compliments? You will tell her that I shall do myself the honor of calling upon her? Thanks, very much. We shall be ghosts together, poor mamma and I; you need not be *chez vous* when I call, unless you are quite willing – that is, if you are afraid of ghosts."

"Oh, I'm not," laughed Pauline. "I don't believe in them, Mr. Varick."

"That is delightful for you to say!" her companion exclaimed. "It means that you will listen for a little while to our spectral conversation and not find it too *ennuyeuse*. How very kind of you! Ah! we old fellows are sometimes very grateful for a few crumbs of kindness!"

"You can have a whole loaf from me, if you want," said Pauline, with an air of girlish diversion.

Not long afterward she declared to her cousin, Courtlandt: "I like the old gentleman ever so much, Court. He's a refreshing change. You New York men are all cut after the same pattern."

"I'm afraid he's cut with a rather crooked scissors," said Courtlandt, who indulged in a sly epigram oftener than he got either credit or discredit for doing.

"Oh," said Pauline, as if slowly understanding. "You mean he is *French*, I suppose."

"Quite French, they report."

Mr. Varick made his promised visit upon Pauline and her mother sooner than either of them expected. Mrs. Van Corlear was rather more ill than usual, on the day he appeared, and almost the full burden of the ensuing conversation fell upon her daughter.

The next evening, at the opera, he dropped into a certain box where Pauline was seated with her aunt, Mrs. Poughkeepsie. On the following day Pauline received, anonymously, an immense basket of exquisite flowers. Twice again Mr. Varick called upon her mother, in the charmless upstairs sitting-room of their boarding house. As it chanced, Pauline was not at home either time.

An evening or two afterward she returned at about eleven o'clock from a theatre party, to find that her mother had not yet retired. Mrs. Van Corlear's usual bed-time was a very exact ten o'clock.

The mother and daughter talked for a little while together in low tones. When Pauline went into her own chamber that night, her face was pale and her heart was beating.

At a great afternoon reception which took place two days later, Courtlandt, who made his appearance after five o'clock, coming up town from the law-office in which he managed by hard work to clear a yearly two thousand dollars or so, said to his cousin, with a sharpened and rather inquisitive look:

"What's the matter? You don't seem to be in good spirits."

Pauline looked at him steadily for a moment. It was a great crush, and people were babbling all about them. "There's something I want to speak of," the girl presently said, in a lingering way.

A kind of chill stole through Courtlandt's veins at this, – he did not know why; he always afterward had a lurking credence in the truth of presentments.

"What is it?" he asked.

Pauline told him what it was. He grew white as he listened, and a glitter crept into his eyes, and brightened there.

"You're not going to *do* it?" he said, when she had finished.

She made no answer. She had some flowers knotted in the bosom of her walking dress, and she now looked down at them. They were not the flowers Mr. Varick had sent; they were a bunch bestowed by Courtlandt himself at a little informal dance of the previous evening, where the cotillon had had one pretty floral figure. She regarded their petals through a mist of unshed tears, now, though her cousin did not know it.

He repeated his question, bending nearer. It seemed to him as if the sun in heaven must have stopped moving until she made her answer.

"You know what mamma is, Court," she faltered.

"Yes, I do. She has very false views of many things. But you have not. You can't be sold without your own consent."

"Let us go away from here together," she murmured. "These rooms are so hot and crowded that I can hardly breathe in them."

He gave her his arm, and they pushed their way forth into a neighboring hall through one of the broad yet choked doorways.

Outside, in Fifth Avenue, the February twilight had just begun to deepen. The air was mild though damp; a sudden spell of clemency had enthralled the weather, and the snow, banked in crisp pallor along the edge of either sidewalk, would soon shrink and turn sodden. At the far terminus of every western street burned a haze of dreamy gold light where the sun had just dropped from view, but overhead the sky had that treacherous tint of vernal amethyst which is so often a delusive snare to the imprudent truster of our mutable winters. Against this vapory mildness of color the house-tops loomed sharp and dark; a humid wind blew straight from the south; big and small sleighs were darting along, with the high, sweet carillons of their bells now loud and now low; through the pavements that Courtlandt and Pauline were treading, great black spots of dampness had slipped their cold ooze, to tell of the thaw that lay beneath. Yesterday the sky had been a livid and frosty azure, and the sweep of the arctic blast had had the cut of a blade in it; to-day the city was steeped in a languor of so abrupt a coming that you felt its peril while you owned its charm. Courtlandt broke the silence that had followed their exit. He spoke as if the words forced themselves between his shut teeth.

"I can't believe that you really mean to do it," he said, watching Pauline's face as she moved onward, looking neither to right nor left. "It would be horrible of you! He is over sixty if he's a day, besides having been mixed up in more than one scandal with women over there in Paris. I think it must be all a joke on your part. If it is, I wish for God's sake that you'd tell me so, Pauline!"

"It isn't," she said. She turned her face to his, then, letting him see how pale and sad it was. "I must do it, Court," she went on. "It's like a sort of fate, forcing and dragging me. I had no business to mention mamma in the matter, I suppose. She couldn't *make* me consent, of course, although, if I did not, her lamentations would take a most distracting form for the next year or two. No; it's not she; it's myself. I don't live in a world where people hold very high views of matrimony. And I hate the life I'm living now. The other would be independence, even if bought at a dear price. And how many girls would envy me my chance? What am I at present but a mere pensioner on my wealthy relatives? I can't stay in; I've started with the whirl, and I can't stop. Everybody whom I know is dancing along at the same pace. If I declined invitations; if I didn't do as all the other girls are doing; if I said 'No, I'm poor and can't afford it,' – then mamma would begin tuning her harp and sending up her wail. And I should be bored to death, besides." Here Pauline gave a hollow laugh, and slightly threw back her head. "Good Heavens!" she continued, "there's nothing strange in it. I've been brought up to expect it; I knew it would probably come, and I was taught, prepared, warned, to regard it when it did come in only one way. If he hadn't been old he might have been shocking. What a piercing pertinence there is to my case in that little proverb, 'Beggars mustn't be choosers!' I'm a beggar, you know: ask Aunt Cynthia Poughkeepsie if she doesn't think I am. And *he's* quite the reverse of shocking, truly. His hair may be rather white, but his teeth are extremely so, and I think they're indigenous, aboriginal; I hope if they're not he will never tell me, anyway."

She gave another laugh, as mirthless as if the spectre of herself had framed it. She had turned her face away from him again, and slightly quickened her walk.

"You mean, then, that your mind is really made up!" said Courtlandt, with an ire, a fierceness, that she had never seen in him before. "You mean that for a little riches, a little power, you'll turn marriage, that should be a holy usage, into this wicked mockery?"

Pauline bit her lip. Such a speech as this from her equanimous cousin was literally without precedent. She felt stung and guilty as she said, with cool defiance, —

"Who holds marriage as a holy usage? I've never seen anyone who did."

"I do!" he asseverated, with clouding face. "You do, too, Pauline in your heart."

"I haven't any heart. They're not worn nowadays. They're out of fashion. We carry purses instead – when we can."

"I think I will tell Mr. Varick you said that," he answered, measuring each word grimly.

"Oh, do!" Pauline exclaimed. A weary and mournful bravado filled her tones. "How he would laugh! Do you fancy he thinks I care a button for him? Why, nearly the first sentence he spoke to

mamma on this weighty subject concerned the number of yearly thousands he was willing to settle upon me."

"So, it is all arranged?"

"It only awaits your approval."

"It can only get my contempt!"

"That is too bad. I thought you would anticipate some of the charming little dinners I intend to give. He has dreadful attacks of the gout, I have learned, and sometimes I'll ask you to preside with me in his vacant chair. That is, if you" —

But he would hear no more. He turned on his heel and left her. He bitterly told himself that her heart was ice, and not worth wasting a thought upon. But he wasted a good many that night, and days afterward.

Whether ice or not, it was a very heavy heart as Pauline went homeward. Just in proportion as the excuses for her conduct were ready on her lips, so they were futile to appease her conscience.

And yet she exulted in one justifying circumstance, as she herself named it. "If I *loved* anybody — Court, or anybody else," she reflected, "I never *could* do it! But I don't. It's going to make a great personage of me. I want to find out how it feels to be a great personage. I want to try the new sensation of not wearing charity gloves..." She had almost a paroxysm of nervous tears, alone in her own room, a little later. That evening Mr. Varick once more presented himself...

At about eleven o'clock he jumped into a cab which he had kept waiting an interminable time, and lighted a very fragrant cigar as he was being driven off.

"*Elle est belle à faire peur*," he muttered aloud. And the next moment a thought passed through his mind which would resemble this, if put into English, though he always thought in French: —

"I will write to Madeleine to-morrow, and send her ten thousand francs. That will end everything — and if the gout spares me five years longer I shan't see Paris while it does."

He had not by any means come home to die. He had said so because it had a neat sound, throwing a perfume of sentiment about his return. And he was always fond of the perfume of sentiment. In reality he had come home to look after his affairs, which had grown burdensomely prosperous, and then sail back with all the decorous haste allowable.

Perhaps he had come home with a few other trifling motives. But of every conceivable motive, he had *not* come with one. That one was — to marry. And yet he had to-night arranged his alliance (satisfactorily on both sides, it was to be hoped) with Miss Pauline Van Corlear.

He leaned back in the dimness of the speeding cab, and reflected upon it. His reflections made him laugh, and as he laughed his lip curled up below his white mustache and showed his white teeth, with the good, dark cigar between them — the teeth of which Pauline had said that if they were false she did not wish to know it.

II

The marriage was a quiet one, and took place in the early following spring. Pauline made a very lovely bride, but as this comment is delivered upon a most ample percentage of all the brides in Christendom, it is scarcely worth being recorded. The whole important constituency of her kindred were graciously pleased at the match, with a single exception. This was Courtlandt Beekman, who managed to be absent in Washington at the time of the wedding. Pauline's presents were superb; the Poughkeepsies, Amsterdams, and all the rest, came forth in expensive sanction of the nuptials. After a brief Southern tour the wedded pair took up their abode in the newly appointed Bond Street mansion. Mrs. Van Corlear, already ensconced there, welcomed them with as beaming a smile as her invalid state would permit. Pauline, as she kissed her, wondered if those same bloodless lips would ever have any further excuse for querulous complaint. It was pathetic to note the old lady's gratified quiver while her thin hand was gallantly imprinted, as well, by the kiss of her new son-in-law. She had surely reached the goal of all her earthly hopes. She had a silken chair to rock in, and a maid as her special attendant, and a doctor to be as devoted and exorbitant as he chose. Her neuralgia, her asthma, her rheumatism, her thousand and one ailments, were henceforth to wreak their dolorous inflictions among the most comfortable and sumptuous surroundings. And yet, as if in mockery of her new facilities for being the truly aristocratic invalid, this poor lady, after a few weeks of the most encouraging opportunity, forsook all its commodious temptations and quietly died in her bed of a sudden heart-seizure.

On the occasion of her death Pauline's husband, who had thus far been scrupulously polite, made a remark which struck his wife as brutal, and roused her resentment. He was a good deal more brutal, in a glacial, exasperating way, as Pauline's anger manifested itself. But shortly after the funeral he was prostrated by a sharp attack of his gout, during which Pauline nursed him with forgiving assiduity.

The young wife was now in deep mourning. Her husband's attack had been almost fatal. His recovery was slow, and a voyage to Europe was urgently recommended by his physicians. They sailed in latter June. Courtlandt was among those who saw Pauline off in the steamer. He looked, while taking her hand in farewell, as if he felt very sorry for her. Pauline seemed in excellent spirits; her black dress became her; she was so blonde that you saw the gold hair before you marked the funereal garb; and then she had her smile very ready, which had always won nearly everybody. Perhaps only Courtlandt, in his wise, grave taciturnity, saw just how factitious the smile was.

Mr. Varick quite recovered from this attack. Pauline's letters said so. They had soon left London, near which the Cunarder had brought them, and gone to Paris; Mr. Varick was feeling so much better from the voyage, and had always felt so at home in Paris. For several months afterward Pauline's letters were sent over-sea in the most desultory and irregular fashion. And what they contained by no means pleased their recipients. She appeared to tell nothing about herself; she was always writing of the city. As if one couldn't read of the Tuileries and Nôtre Dame in a thousand books! As if one hadn't been there oneself! Why did she not write *how they were getting on together*? That was the one imperative stimulus for curiosity among all Pauline's friends and kindred – how they were getting on together. All, we should add, except Courtlandt, who seemed to manifest no curiosity of whatever sort. Of course one could not write and ask her, point blank! What was one to do? Did rambling essays upon the pleasures of a trip to Versailles, or the recreation of a glimpse of Fontainebleau, mean that Mr. Varick had or had not broken loose in a mettlesome manner from his latter-day matrimonial traces?

"We are prepared for anything, you know," Mrs. Poughkeepsie, Pauline's aunt and former patron, had once rather effusively said to Courtlandt. "Now that Hamilton Varick is well, he might be larking over there to any dreadful extent. And Pauline, from sheer pride, mightn't be willing to tell us."

"Very cruel of her, certainly," Courtlandt had responded, laconic and not a little sarcastic as well.

But as months went by, Pauline's correspondents forgot, in the absorption engendered by more national incentives for gossip, the unsatisfactory tone of her letters. Once, however, Pauline wrote that she wished very much to return, but that her husband preferred remaining in Paris.

"He won't come back!" immediately rose the cry on this side of the water. "He's keeping her over there against her will! How perfectly horrible! Well, she deserves it for marrying a *vieux galant* like that! Poor Pauline! With her looks she might have married somebody of respectable age. But she wouldn't wait. She was so crazy to make her market, poor girl! It's to be hoped that he doesn't beat her, or anything of that frightful sort!"

One auditor of these friendly allusions would smile at them with furtive but pardonable scorn. This auditor was Courtlandt; and he remembered how the same compassionate declaimers had been the first to applaud Pauline's astounding betrothal.

After two years of absence on the part of Mr. and Mrs. Varick, certain rumors drifted to America. This or that person had seen them in Paris. Pauline was still pretty as ever, but living quite retired. It was said she had taken to books and general mental improvement. No one ever saw her with her husband. She never alluded to him in any way. There were queer stories about his goings on. It was hard to verify them; Paris was so big, and so many men were always doing such funny things there.

The conclave on these shores heard and sympathetically shuddered. The "new set" had now healed all its old feuds. New York society was in a condition of amicably cemented factions. The Briggs girls and the Snowe girls had married more or less loftily, and had proved to the Amsterdams and others that they were worthy of peaceable affiliation. "Poor Pauline Varick" began to be a phrase, though a somewhat rare one, for without anybody actually waking to the fact, she had been living abroad four whole years. And then, without the least warning, came the news that she was a widow.

She was universally expected home, then, after the tidings that her husband was positively dead had been confirmed beyond the slightest doubt. But perhaps for this reason Pauline chose to remain abroad another year. When she did return her widowhood was an established fact. Her New York *clientèle* had grown used to it. Mr. Varick had left her all his fortune; she was a very wealthy young widow. Aggressive queries respecting his death, or his deportment during the foreign sojourn that preceded his death, were now quite out of order. She had buried him, as she had married him, decently and legally. He slept in Père la Chaise, by his own *ante mortem* request. No matter what sort of a life he had led her; it was nobody's business. She returned home, two years later, to take a high place and hold a high head. Those merciful intervening years shielded her from a multitude of stealthy interrogatories. She did not care to be questioned much regarding her European past as the wife of Mr. Varick, and she soon contrived to make it plain that she did not. There was no dissentient voice in the verdict that she had greatly changed. And in a physical sense no one could deny that she had changed for the better.

Her figure, which had before been quite too thin despite its pliant grace, was now rounded into soft and charming curves. Her gray eyes sparkled less often, but they glowed with a steadier light for perhaps this reason; they looked as if more of life's earnest actualities had been reflected in them. Her face, with its chiselled features all blending to produce so high-bred and refined an expression, rarely broke into a smile now, but some unexplained fascination lay in its acquired seriousness, that made the smile of brighter quality and deeper import when it really came. She wore her copious and shining hair in a heavy knot behind, and let it ripple naturally toward either pure temple, instead of having it bush low down over her forehead in a misty turmoil, as previously. Her movements, her walk, her gestures, all retained the volatile briskness and freedom they had possessed of old; there was not even the first matronly hint about her air, and yet it was more self-poised, more emphatic, more womanly.

"I really must move out of this dreadful Bond Street," she said to Courtlandt, rather early in the conversation which took place between them on the day of their first meeting. "I think I could

endure it for some time longer if that immense tailor-shop had not gone up there at the Broadway corner, where such a lovely, drowsy old mansion used to stand. Yes, I must let myself be compliantly swept further up town. There is a kind of Franco-German tavern just across the way that advertises a 'regular dinner' – whatever that is – from twelve o'clock till three, every day, at twenty-five cents."

"I see you haven't forgotten our national currency," said Courtlandt, with one of his inscrutable dispositions of countenance.

Pauline tossed her head in a somewhat French way. "I have forgotten very little about my own country," she said.

"You are glad to get back to it, then?"

"Yes, very. I want to take a new view of it with my new eyes."

"You got a new pair of eyes in Europe?"

"I got an older pair." She looked at him earnestly for a moment. "Tell me, Court," she went on, "how is it that I find you still unmarried?"

He shifted in his chair, crossing his legs. "Oh," he said, "no nice girl has made me an offer."

Pauline laughed. "As if she'd be nice if she had! Do you remember how they used to say you would marry in the other set? Is there another set now?"

"There is a number of fresh ones. New York is getting bigger every day, you know. Young men are being graduated from college, young girls from seminaries. I forget just what special set you mean that you expected me to marry into."

"No, you don't!" cried Pauline, with soft positiveness. She somehow felt herself getting quietly back into the old easy terms with Courtlandt. His sobriety, that never echoed her gay moods, yet always seemed to follow and enjoy them, had re-addressed her like a familiar though alienated friend. "You recollect perfectly how Aunt Cynthia Poughkeepsie used to lift that Roman nose of hers and declare that she would never allow her Sallie to know those fast Briggs and Snowe girls, who had got out because society had been neglected by all the real gentry in town for a space of at least five years?"

Courtlandt gave one of his slow nods. "Oh, yes, I recollect. Aunt Cynthia was quite wrong. She's pulled in her horns since then. The Briggses and the Snowes were much too clever for her. They were always awfully well-mannered girls, too, besides being so jolly. They needed her, and they coolly made use of her, and of a good many revived leaders like her, besides. Most of the good men like them; that was their strong point. It was all very well to say they hadn't had ancestors who knew Canal Street when it was a canal, and shot deer on Twenty-Third Street; but that wouldn't do at all. No matter how their parents had made their money, they knew how to spend it like swells, and they had pushed themselves into power and were not to be elbowed out. The whole fight soon died a natural death. They and their supporters are nearly all married now and married pretty well."

"And you didn't marry one of them, Court?"

Courtlandt gave a slight, dry cough. "I'm under the impression, Pauline," he said, "that I did not."

"How long ago it all seems!" she murmured, drooping her blond head and fingering with one hand at a button on the front of her black dress. "It's only four years, and yet I fancy it to be a century." She raised her head. "Then the Knickerbockers, as we used to call them, no longer rule?"

Courtlandt laughed gravely. "I don't know that they ever did," he answered.

"Well, they used to give those dancing-classes, you know, where nobody was ever admitted unless he or she had some sort of patrician claim. Don't you recollect how Mrs. Schenectady, when she gave Lily a Delmonico Blue-Room party (do they have Delmonico Blue-Room parties, now?), instructed old Grace Church Brown to challenge at the Fourteenth Street entrance (where he would always wait as a stern horror for the coachmen of the arriving and departing carriages) anybody who did not present a certain mysterious little card at the sacred threshold?"

"Oh, yes," returned Courtlandt ruminatively.

"And how," continued Pauline, "that democratic Mrs. Vanderhoff happened to bring, on this same evening, some foreign gentleman who had dined with her, and whom she meant to present with an apologetic flourish to the Schenectadys, when suddenly the corpulent sentinel, Brown, desired from her escort the mysterious card, and finding it not to be forthcoming sent a messenger upstairs? And how Mr. Schenectady presently appeared and informed Mrs. Vanderhoff, with a cool snobbery which had something sublime about it, that he was exceedingly sorry, but the rule had been passed regarding the admission of any non-invited guest to his entertainment?"

"Oh, yes; I remember it all," said Courtlandt. "Schenectady behaved like a cad. Nobody is half so strict, nowadays, nor half so grossly uncivil. You'll find society very much changed, if you go out. You'll see people whose names you never heard before. I sometimes think there's nothing required to make one's self a great swell nowadays except three possessions, all metallic – gold, silver, and brass."

"How amusing!" said Pauline. "And yet," she suddenly added, with a swift shake of the head, "I'm sure it will never amuse *me!* No, Court, I have grown a very different person from the ignorant girl you once saw me!" She lowered her voice here, and regarded him with a tender yet impressive fixity. "When I look back upon it all now, and think how I used to hold the code of living which those people adopt as something that I must respect and even reverence, I can scarcely believe that the whole absurd comedy did not happen in some other planet. You don't know how much I've been through since you met me last. I'm not referring to my husband. It isn't pleasant for me to talk about *that* part of the past. I wouldn't say even this much to any one except you; but now that I have said it, I'll say more, and tell you that I endured a good deal of solid trial, solid humiliation, solid heart-burning... There, let us turn that page over, you and myself, and never exchange another word on the subject. You were perfectly right; the thing I did *was* horrible, and I've bought my yards of sackcloth, my bushels of ashes. If it were to do over again, I'd rather beg, starve, die in the very gutter. There's no exaggeration, here; I have grown to look on this human destiny of ours with such utterly changed vision – I've so broadened in a mental and moral sense, that my very identity of the past seems as if it were something I'd moulted, like the old feathers of a bird. Feathers make a happy simile; I was lighter than a feather, then – as light as thistledown. I had no principles; I merely had caprices. I had no opinions of my own; other people's were handed to me and I blindly accepted them. My chief vice, which was vanity, I mistook for the virtue of self-respect, and kept it carefully polished, like a little pocket-mirror to look at one's face in. I was goaded by an actually sordid avarice, and I flattered myself that it was a healthy matrimonial ambition. I swung round in a petty orbit no larger than a saucer's rim, and imagined it to have the scope of a star's. I chattered gossip with fops of both sexes, and called it conversation. I bounced and panted through the German for two hours of a night, and declared it to be enjoyment. I climbed up to the summit of a glaring yellow-wheeled drag and sat beside some man whose limited wit was entirely engrossed by the feat of driving four horses at once; and because poor people stopped to sigh, and silly ones to envy, and sensible ones to pity, as we rumbled up the Avenue in brazen ostentation, I considered myself an elect and exceptional being. Of course I must have had some kind of a better nature lying comatose behind all this placid tolerance of frivolity. Otherwise the change never would have come; for the finest seed will fail if the soil is entirely barren."

"You have taken a new departure, with a vengeance," said Courtlandt. He spoke in his usual tranquil style. He considered the sketch Pauline had just drawn of her former self very exaggerated and prejudiced. He had his own idea of what she used to be. He was observing her with an excessive keenness of scrutiny, now, underneath his reposeful demeanor. But he aired none of his contradictory beliefs. It is possible that he had never had a downright argument with any fellow-creature in his life. Somehow the brief sentence which he had just spoken produced the impression of his having said a great deal more than this. It was always thus with the man; by reason of some unique value in his silence any terse variation of it took a reflected worth.

Pauline's hands were folded in her lap; she was looking down at them with a musing air. She continued to speak without lifting her gaze. "Yes," she went on, "the reformatory impulse must have been latent all that time. I can't tell just what quickened it into its present activity. But I am sure, now, that it will last as long as I do."

"What are the wonders it is going to accomplish?"

"Don't satirize it," she exclaimed, looking up at him with a start. "It is a power for good."

"I hope so," he said.

"I know so! Courtlandt, I've come back home to live after my own fashion. I've come back with an idea, a theory. Of course a good many people will laugh at me. I expect a certain amount of ridicule. But I shall despise it so heartily that it will not make me swerve a single inch. I intend to be very social – yes, enormously so. My drawing-rooms shall be the resort of as many friends as I can bring together – but all of a certain kind."

"Pray, of what kind?"

"You shall soon see. They are to be men and women of intellectual calibre; they are to be workers and not drones; they are to be thinkers, writers, artists, poets, scholars. They can come, if they please, in abnormal coats and unconventional gowns; I sha'n't care for that. They can be as poor as church mice, as unsuccessful as talent nearly always is, as quaint in manner as genius incessantly shows itself." Here Pauline rose, and made a few eloquent little gestures with both hands, while she moved about the room in a way that suggested the hostess receiving imaginary guests. "I mean to organize a *salon*," she continued – "a veritable *salon*. I mean to wage a vigorous crusade against the aimless flippancy of modern society. I've an enthusiasm for my new undertaking. Wait till you see how valiantly I shall carry it out."

"Am I to understand," said Courtlandt, without the vestige of a smile, "that you mean to begin by cutting all your former friends?"

She glanced at him as if with a suspicion of further satire. But his sedate mien appeared to reassure her. "Cutting them?" she repeated. "No; of course not."

"But you will not invite them to your *salon*?"

She tossed her head again. "They would be quite out of place there. They are not in earnest about anything. Everybody whom I shall have must be in earnest. I intend to lay great stress upon that one requirement. It is to be a passport of admission. My apartments are to be at once easy and difficult of entrance. I shall not object to the so-called aristocratic class, although if any applicant shall solicit my notice who is undoubtedly a member of this class, I shall in a certain way hold the fact as disqualifying; it shall be remembered against him; if I admit him at all I shall do so in spite of it and not because of it. – Is my meaning quite clear on this point?"

"Oh, excessively," said Courtlandt; "you could not have made it more so. All ladies and gentlemen are to be received under protest."

He let one of his odd, rare laughs go with the last sentence, and for this reason Pauline merely gave him a magnificent frown instead of visiting upon him more wrathful reprimand. At the same time she said: "It's a subject, Court, on which I am unprepared for trivial levity. If you can't treat it with respect I prefer that you should warn me in time, and I will reserve all further explanations of my project."

He gave a slight, ambiguous cough. "If I seem disrespectful you must lay it to my ignorance."

"I should be inclined to do that without your previous instructions." Here she regarded him with a commiseration that he thought delicious; it was so palpably genuine; she so grandly overlooked the solemn roguery that ambuscaded itself behind his humility.

"You see," he went on, "I haven't learned the vocabulary of radicalism, so to speak. I think I know the fellows you propose to have; they wear long hair, quite often, and big cloaks instead of top-coats, and collars low enough in the neck to show a good deal of wind-pipe. As for the women, they" —

"It is perfectly immaterial to me how any of them may dress!" she interrupted, with majestic disapproval. "I ought to be very sorry for you, Courtlandt, and I am. You're clever enough not to let yourself rust, like this, all your days. I don't believe you've ever read one of the works of the great modern English thinkers. You're sluggishly satisfied to go jogging along in the same old ruts that humanity has worn deep for centuries. Of course you never had, and never will have, the least spark of enthusiasm. You're naturally lethargic; if a person stuck a pin into you I don't believe you would jump. But all this is no reason why you shouldn't try and live up to the splendid advancements of your age. When my constituents are gathered about me – when I have fairly begun my good work of centralizing and inspiriting my little band of sympathizers – when I have defined in a practical way my intended opposition to the vanities and falsities of existing creeds and tenets, why, then, I will let you mingle with my assemblages and learn for yourself how you've been wasting both time and opportunity."

"That is extremely good of you," murmured Courtlandt imperturbably. "I supposed your doors were to be closed upon me for good and all."

"Oh, no. I shall insist, indeed, that you drop in upon us very often. I shall need your presence. You are to be my connecting link, as it were."

"How very pleasant! You have just told me that I was benighted. Now I find myself a connecting link."

"Between culture and the absence of it. I have no objection to your letting the giddy and whimsical folk perceive what a vast deal they are deprived of. Besides, I should like you to be my first conversion – a sort of bridge by which other converts may cross over into the happy land."

"You are still most kind. I believe that bridges are usually wooden. No doubt you feel that you have made a wise selection of your material. May I be allowed to venture another question?"

"Yes – if it is not too impudent."

She was watching him with her head a little on one side, now, and a smile struggling forth from her would-be serious lips. She was recollecting how much she had always liked him, and considering how much she would surely like him hereafter, in this renewal of their old half-cousinly and half-flirtatious intimacy. She was thinking what deeps of characteristic drollery slept in him – with what a quiet, funny sort of martyrdom he had borne her little girlish despotisms, before that sudden marriage had wrought so sharp a rupture of their relations, and how often he had forced her into unwilling laughter by the slow and almost sleepy humor with which he had successfully parried some of her most vigorous attacks.

"I merely wanted to ask you," he now said, "where all these extraordinary individuals are to be found."

"Ah, that is an important question, certainly," she said, with a solemn inclination – or at least the semblance of one. "I intend to collect them."

"Good gracious! You speak of them as if they were minerals or mummies that you were going to get together for a museum. I have no doubt that they will be curiosities, by the bye."

"I am afraid *you* will find them so."

"Are they to be imported?"

"Oh, no. That will not be necessary."

"I see; they're domestic products."

"Quite so. In this great city – filled with so much energy, so much re-action against the narrow feudalisms of Europe – I am very certain of finding them." She paused for a moment, and seemed to employ a tacit interval for the accumulation of what she next said. "I shall not be entirely unassisted in my search, either."

A cunning twinkle became manifest in the brown eyes of her listener. He drew a long breath. "Ah! now we get at the root of the matter. There's a confederate – an accomplice, so to speak."

"I prefer that you should not allude to my assistant in so rude a style. Especially as, in the first place, you have never met him, and, in the second, he is a person of the most remarkable gifts."

"Is there any objection to my asking his name? Or is it still a dark mystery?"

She laughed at this, as if she thought it highly diverting. "My dear cousin," she exclaimed, "how absurd you can be at a pinch! What on earth should make the name of Mr. Kindelon a dark mystery?"

"Um-m-m. Somebody you met abroad, then?"

"Somebody I met on the steamer, while returning."

"I see. An Englishman?"

"A gentleman of Irish birth. He has lived in New York for a number of years. He knows a great many of the intellectual people here. He has promised to help me in my efforts. He will be of great value."

Courtlandt rose. "So are your spoons, Pauline," he said rather gruffly, not at all liking the present drift of the information. "Take my advice, and lock them up when you give your first *salon*."

III

Pauline had not been long in her native city again before she made the discovery that a great deal was now socially expected of her. The news of her return spread abroad with a rapidity more suggestive of bad than of good tidings; her old acquaintances, male and female, flocked to the Bond Street house with a most loyal promptitude. The ladies came in glossy *coupés* and dignified coaches, not seldom looking about them with *dilletante* surprise at the mercantile glare and tarnish of this once neat and seemly crossway, as they mounted Mrs. Varick's antiquated stoop. Most of them were now married; they had made their market, as Pauline's deceased mother would have said, and it is written of them with no wanton harshness that they had in very few cases permitted sentiment to enact the part of salesman. There is something about the fineness of our republican ideals (however practice may have determinedly lowered and soiled them) that makes the mere worldly view of marriage a special provocation to the moralist. Regarded as a convenient mutual barter in Europe, there it somehow shocks far less; the wrong of the grizzled bridegroom winning the young, loveless, but acquiescent bride bears a historic stamp; we recall, perhaps, that they have always believed in that kind of savagery over there; it is as old as their weird turrets and their grim torture-chambers. But with ourselves, who broke loose, in theory at least, from a good many tough bigotries, the sacredness of the marriage state presents a much more meagre excuse for violation. It was not that the husbands of Pauline's wedded friends were in any remembered instance grizzled, however; they were indeed, with few exceptions, by many years the juniors of her own dead veteran spouse; but the influences attendant upon their unions with this or that maiden had first concerned the question of money as a primary and sovereign force, and next that of name, prestige, or prospective elevation. These young brides had for the most part sworn a much more sincere fidelity to the carriages in which they now rode, and the pretty or imposing houses in which they dwelt, than to the important, though not indispensable, human attachments of such prized commodities.

Pauline found them all strongly monotonous; she could ill realize that their educated simpers and their regimental sort of commonplace had ever been potent to interest her. One had to pay out such a small bit of line in order to sound them; one's plummet so soon struck bottom, as it were. She found herself silently marvelling at the serenity of their contentment; no matter how gilded were the cages in which they made their decorous little trills, what elegance of filigree could atone for the absence of space and the paucity of perches?

The men whom she had once known and now re-met pleased her better. They had, in this respect, the advantage of their sex. Even when she condemned them most heartily as shallow and fatuous, their detected admiration of her beauty or of their pleasure in her company won for them the grace of a pardoning afterthought. They were still bachelors, and some of them more maturely handsome bachelors than when she had last looked upon them. They had niceties and felicities of attitude, of intonation, of tailoring, of boot or glove, to which, without confessing it, she was still in a degree susceptible.

But she did not encourage them. They were not of her new world; she had got quite beyond them. She flattered herself that she always affected them as being gazed down upon from rather chilly heights. She insisted on telling herself that they were much more difficult to talk with than she really found them. This was one of the necessities of her conversion; they must not prove agreeable any longer; it was inconsequent, untenable, that they should receive from her anything but a merely hypocritical courtesy. She wanted her contempt for the class of which they were members to be in every way logical, and so manufactured premises to suit its desired integrity. Meanwhile she was much more entertaining than she knew, and treated Courtlandt, one day, with quite a shocked sternness for having informed her that these male visitors had passed upon her some very admiring criticisms.

"I have done my best to behave civilly," she declared. "I was in my own house, you know, when they called. But I cannot understand how they can possibly *like* me as they no doubt used to do! I would much rather have you bring me quite a contrary opinion, in fact."

"If you say so," returned Courtlandt, with his inimitable repose, "I will assure them of their mistake and request that they correct it."

Pauline employed no self-deception whatever in the acknowledgment of her real feelings toward Courtlandt. She cherished for him what she liked to tell herself was an inimical friendliness. In the old days he had never asked her to marry him, and yet it had been plain to her that under favoring conditions he might have made her this proposal. She was nearly certain that he no longer regarded her with a trace of the former tenderness. On her own side she liked him so heartily, notwithstanding frequent antagonisms, that the purely amicable nature of this fondness blurred any conception of him in the potential light of a lover.

But, indeed, Pauline had resolutely closed her eyes against the possibility of ever again receiving amorous declaration or devotion. She had had quite enough of marriage. Her days of sentiment were past. True, they had never actually been, but the phantasmal equivalent for them had been, and she now determined upon not replacing this by a more accentuated experience. Her path toward middle life was very clearly mapped out in her imagination; it was to be strewn with nicely sifted gravel and bordered by formally clipped foliage. And it was to be very straight, very direct; there should be no bend in it that came upon a grove with sculptured Cupid and rustic lounge. The "marble muses, looking peace" might gleam now and then through its enskirting boskage, but that should be all. Pauline had read and studied with a good deal of fidelity, both during her marriage and after her widowhood. She had gone into the acquisition of knowledge and the development of thought as some women go into the intoxication of a nervine. Her methods had been amateurish and desultory; she had not been taught, she had learned, and hence learned ill. "The modern thinkers," as she called them, delighted her with their liberality, their iconoclasm. She was in just that receptive mood to be made an extremist by their doctrines, the best of which so sensibly warn us against extremes. Her husband's memory, for the sake of decency if for no other reason, deserved the reticence which she had shown concerning it. He had revealed to her a hollow nature whose void was choked with vice, like some of those declivities in neglected fields, where the weed and the brier run riot. The pathos of her position, in a foreign land, with a lord whose daily routine of misconduct left her solitary for hours, while inviting her, had she so chosen, to imitate a course of almost parallel license, was finally a cogent incentive toward that change which ensued. The whole falsity of the educational system which had resulted in her detested marriage was slowly laid bare to her eyes by this shocking and salient example of it.

There was something piteous, and yet humorous as well, in her present intellectual state. She was a young leader in the cause of culture, without a following. She believed firmly in herself, and yet deceived herself. Much in the world that it was now her fixed principle to shun and reprobate, she liked and clung to. These points of attraction were mostly superficialities, it is true, like the fashion of clothes or the conventionalism of accepted social customs. But even these she had more than half persuaded herself that she despised, and when she observed them in others they too often blinded her to attractions of a less flimsy sort. She had verged upon a sanguine and florid fanaticism, and was wholly unconscious of her peril. Some of Courtlandt's sober comments might effectually have warned her, if it had not been for a marked contrary influence. This was represented by the gentleman whom we have already heard her name as Mr. Kindelon.

She had been presented to him on the steamer during her recent homeward voyage, by an acquaintance who knew little enough regarding his antecedents. But Ralph Kindelon had been at once very frank with her. This was the most prominent trait that usually disclosed itself in him on a first acquaintance; he always managed to impress you by his frankness. He had a large head set on a large frame of splendid, virile proportions. His muscular limbs were moulded superbly; his big hands and

feet had the same harmony of contour, despite their size; his grace of movement was extraordinary, considering his height and weight; the noble girth and solidity of chest struck you as you stood close to him – men found it so substantially, women so protectively, human. A kind of warmth seemed to diffuse itself from his bodily nearness, as if the pulse of his blood must be on some exceptionally liberal scale. But for those whom he really fascinated his real fascinations lay elsewhere. You met them in the pair of facile dimples that gave genial emphasis to his sunny smile; in the crisp, coarse curl of his blue-black hair, which receded at either temple, and drooped centrally over a broad, full brow; in the sensuous, ample, ruddy mouth, which so often showed teeth of perfect shape and unflawed purity, and was shaded by a mustache tending to chestnut in shade, with each strong crinkled hair of it rippling away to the smooth-sloping cheeks; and lastly in the violet-tinted Irish eyes, whose deep-black lashes had a beautiful length and gloss.

Kindelon spoke with a decided brogue. It was no mere Celtic accent; it was the pure and original parlance of his native island, though shorn of those ungrammatical horrors with which we are prone by habit to associate it. His English was Irish, as one of his own countrymen might have said, but it was very choice and true English, nevertheless. Well as he spoke it, he spoke it immoderately, even exorbitantly, when the mood was upon him, and the mood was upon him, in a loquacious sense, with considerable pertinacity. He was the sort of man concerning whom you might have said, after hearing him talk three minutes or so, that he talked too much; but if you had listened to him five minutes longer, your modified opinion would probably have been that he scarcely talked too much for so good a talker.

It has been chronicled of him that he was extremely frank. Before he had enlivened during more than an hour, for Pauline, the awful tedium of an Atlantic voyage in winter, she discovered herself to be in a measure posted concerning his personal biography. His parents had been farmers in his native Ireland, and he was the fourth of a family of eleven children. At the age of twelve years a certain benevolent baronet, whose tenant his father was, had sent him to school in Dublin with a view toward training and encouraging a natural and already renowned precocity. At school he had done well until seventeen, and at seventeen he had suddenly found himself thrown on the world, through the death of his patron. After that he had revisited his somewhat distant home for a brief term, and soon afterward had taken passage for America, aided by the funds of an admiring kinsman. He had even then developed evidence of what we call a knack for writing. After severe hardships on these shores, he had drifted into an editorial office in the capacity of printer. This had been a godsend to him, and it had fallen from the skies of Chicago, not New York. But New York had ultimately proved the theatre of those triumphs which were brilliant indeed compared with the humdrum humility of his more Western pursuits. Here he had written articles on many different subjects for the local journals; he had served in almost every drudging department of reportorial work; he had risen, fallen, risen, and at last risen once and for all, durably and honorably, as an associate-editor in a popular and prominent New York journal. He told Pauline the name of his journal – the New York "Asteroid" – and she remembered having heard of it. He laughed his affluent, mellow laugh at this statement, as though it were the most amusing thing in the world to find an American who had only "heard of" the New York "Asteroid."

In a political sense, and moreover in all senses, he was a zealous liberal. How he had managed to scrape together so remarkable an amount of knowledge was a mystery to himself. Everything that he knew had been literally "scraped together;" the phrase could not be apter than when applied to his mental store of facts. He read with an almost phenomenal swiftness, and his exquisite memory retained whatever touched it with a perfection like that of some marvellously sensitive photographic agent. He never forgot a face, a book, a conversation. He hardly forgot a single one of his newspaper articles, and their name was legion. His powers just stopped short of genius, but they distinctly stopped there. He did many things well – many things, in truth, which for a man so hazardously educated it was surprising that he did at all. But he did nothing superlatively well. It was the old story of that fatal

facility possessed by numbers of his own countrymen who have migrated to these shores. Perhaps the one quality that he lacked was a reflective patience – and this is declared of his brains alone, having no reference to his moral parts. He leaped upon subjects, and devoured them, so to speak. It never occurred to him that there is a cerebral digestion, which, if we neglect its demands, inevitably entails upon us a sort of dyspeptic vengeance. In crushing the fruit with too greedy a speed we get to have a blunted taste for its finer flavor.

Within certain very decided limits he had thus far made an easy conquest of Pauline. She had never before met any one whom he remotely resembled. In the old days she would have shrank from him as being unpatrician; now, his fleet speech, his entire lack of repose, his careless, unmodish, though scrupulously clean dress, all had for her an appealing and individual charm. After parting on the arrival in New York, she and Kindelon had soon re-met. He bore the change from oceanic surroundings admirably in Pauline's eyes. With characteristic candor he told her that he had come back from the recent visit to his old parents in Ireland (Pauline knowing all about this visit, of course) to find himself wofully poor. She was wondering whether he would resent the offer of a loan if she made him one, when he suddenly surprised her by a statement with regard to "present funds," that certainly bore no suggestion of poverty. The truth was, he lacked all proper appreciation of the value of money. Economy was an unknown virtue with him; to have was to spend; he was incapable of saving; no financial to-morrow existed for him, and by his careless and often profuse charities he showed the same absence of caution as that which marked all other daily expenditures.

In her immediate purchase of a new residence she consulted with him, and allowed herself to be guided by his counsels. This event brought them more closely together for many days than they would otherwise have been. His artistic feeling and his excellent taste were soon a fresh surprise to her. "I begin to think," she said to him one day, "that there is nothing you do not know."

He laughed his blithe, bass laugh. "Oh," he said, "I know a lot of things in a loose, haphazard way. We newspaper men can't escape general information, Mrs. Varick. We breathe it in, naturally, and in spite of ourselves."

"But tell me," Pauline now asked, "are these other people to whom I shall soon be presented as clever as you are?"

He looked at her with merriment twinkling in his light-tinted eyes. "They're a good deal cleverer – some of them," he replied. "They could give me points and beat me, as we say in billiards."

"You make me very anxious to know them."

"When you talk like that I feel as if I might be tempted to postpone all introductions indefinitely," he responded. He spoke with sudden seriousness, and she felt that mere gallantry had not lain at the root of this answer.

As a matter of course, Kindelon and Courtlandt soon met each other in Pauline's drawing-room. Courtlandt was quite as quiet as usual, and the Irishman perhaps rather unwontedly voluble. Pauline thought she had never heard her new friend talk better. He made his departure before her cousin, and when he had gone Pauline said, with candid enthusiasm:

"Isn't he a wonderful man?"

"Wonderful?" repeated Courtlandt, a trifle drowsily.

She gave him a keen look, and bristled visibly while she did so. "Certainly!" she declared. "No other word just expresses him. I didn't observe you very closely, Court," she went on, "but I took it for granted that you were being highly interested. I can't imagine your *not* being."

"He gave me a kind of singing in the ears," said Courtlandt. "I've got it yet. He makes me think of one of those factories where there's a violent hubbub all the time, so that you have to speak loud if you want to be heard."

Pauline was up in arms, then. "I never listened to a more scandalously unjust criticism!" she exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me, unblushingly, that you do not think him a *very* extraordinary person?"

"Oh, very," said her cousin.

Pauline gave an exasperated sigh. "I am so used to you," she said, "that I should never even be surprised by you. But you need not pretend that you can have any except one *truthful* opinion about Mr. Kindelon."

"I haven't," was the reply. "He's what they call a smart newspaper man. A Bohemian chap, you know. They're nearly all of them just like that. They can talk you deaf, dumb, and blind, if you only give them a chance."

"I don't think the dumbness required any great effort, as far as *you* were concerned!" declared Pauline, with sarcastic belligerence.

She never really quarrelled with Courtlandt, because his impregnable stolidity made such a result next to impossible. But she was now so annoyed by her cousin's slighting comments upon Kindelon that her treatment was touched with a decided coolness for days afterward.

Meanwhile her aunt, Mrs. Poughkeepsie, had undergone considerable discomforting surprise. Mrs. Poughkeepsie had been prepared to find Pauline changed, but by no means changed in her present way. On hearing her niece express certain very downright opinions with regard to the life which she was bent upon hereafter living, this lady at first revealed amazement and afterward positive alarm.

"But my dear Pauline," she said, "you cannot possibly mean that you intend to get yourself talked about?"

"Talked about, Aunt Cynthia? I don't quite catch your drift, really."

"Let me be plainer, then. If you remain out of society, that is one thing. I scarcely went anywhere, as you know, for ten years after my husband's death – not, indeed, until Sallie had grown up and was ready to come out. There is no objection, surely, against closing one's doors upon the world, provided one desires to do so – although I should say that such a step, Pauline, at your age, and after two full years of widowhood, was decidedly a mistake. Still" —

"Pardon me, Aunt Cynthia," Pauline here broke in. "Nothing is further from my wish than to close my doors upon the world. On the contrary, I want to open them very wide indeed."

Mrs. Poughkeepsie lifted in shocked manner both her fair, plump, dimpled hands. She was a stout lady, with that imposing, dowager-like effect of *embonpoint* which accompanies a naturally tall and majestic stature. Her type had never in girlhood been a very feminine one, and it now bordered upon masculinity. Her eyes were hard, calm and dark; her arching nose expressed the most serene self-reliance. She was indeed a person with no doubts; she had, in her way, settled the universe. All her creeds were crystallized, and each, metaphorically, was kept in cotton, as though it were a sort of family diamond. She had been a Miss Schenectady, of the elder, wealthy and more conspicuous branch; it was a most notable thing to have been such a Miss Schenectady. She had married a millionaire, and also a Poughkeepsie; this, moreover, was something very important and fine. She had so distinct a "position" that her remaining out of active participation in social pursuits made no difference whatever as regarded her right to appear and rule whenever she so chose; it had only been necessary for her to lift her spear, when Miss Sallie required her chaperonage, and the Snowes and Briggses had perforce to tremble. And this fact, too, she held as a precious, delectable prerogative.

In not a few other respects she was satisfied regarding herself. There was nothing, for that matter, which concerned herself in any real way, about which she did not feel wholly satisfied. Her environment in her own opinion was of the best, and doubtless in the opinion of a good many of her adherents also. From the necklace of ancestral brilliants which she now wore, sparkling at ball or dinner, on her generous and creamy neck, to the comfortably-cushioned pew in Grace Church, where two good generations of Poughkeepsies had devoutly sat through many years of Sundays, she silently valued and eulogized the gifts which fate had bestowed upon her.

Pauline's present attitude seemed to her something monstrous. It had not seemed monstrous that her niece should give the bloom and vital purity of a sweet maidenhood to a man weighted with years

and almost decrepid from past excesses. But that she should seek any other circle of acquaintance except one sanctioned by the immitigable laws of caste, struck her as a bewildering misdemeanor.

"My dear Pauline," she now exclaimed, "you fill me with a positive fear! Of course, if you shut your doors to the right people you open them to the wrong ones. You have got some strange idea abroad, which you are now determined to carry out – to *exploiter*, my dear! With your very large income there is hardly any dreadful imprudence which you may not commit. There is no use in telling me that the people whom one knows are not worth knowing. If you have got into that curious vein of thought you have no remedy for it except to refrain from all entertaining and all acceptance of courtesies. But I beg, Pauline, that you will hesitate before you store up for yourself the material of ugly future repentance. Sallie and I have accepted the Effinghams' box at the opera to-night. Those poor Effinghams have been stricken by the death of their father; it was so sudden – he was sitting in his library and literally fell dead – he must certainly have left two millions, but of course that has nothing to do with their bereavement, and it was so kind of them to remember us. They know that I have always wanted a proscenium, and that there are no prosceniums, now, to be had for love or money. I have sent our box in the horse-shoe to cousin Kate Ten Eyck; she is so wretchedly cramped in her purse, you know, and still has Lulu on her hands, and will be so grateful – as indeed she wrote me quite gushingly that she *was*, this very afternoon. Now, Pauline, won't you go with us, my dear?"

Pauline went. A noted *prima donna* sang, lured by an immense nightly reward to disclose her vocal splendors before American audiences. But her encompassment, as is so apt to be the case here, was pitifully mediocre. She sang with a presentable contralto, a passable baritone, an effete basso, and an almost despicable tenor. The chorus was anachronistic in costume, sorry in voice, and mournfully undrilled. But the *diva* was so comprehensively talented that she carried the whole performance. At the same time there were those among her hearers who lamented that her transcendent ability should be burlesqued by so shabby and impotent a surrounding. The engagement of this famous lady was meanwhile one of those sad operatic facts for which the American people have found, during years past, no remedy and no preventive. The fault, of course, lies with themselves. When they are sufficiently numerous as true lovers of music they will refuse their countenance to even a great singer except with creditable artistic and scenic support.

Pauline sat in the Effinghams' spacious proscenium-box, between Mrs. Poughkeepsie and her daughter. Sallie Poughkeepsie was a large girl, with her mother's nose, her mother's serenity, her mother's promise of corpulent matronhood. She had immense prospects; it was reported that she had refused at least twenty eligible matrimonial offers while waiting for the parental nod of approval, which had not yet come.

During the first *entr'acte* a little throng of admirers entered the box. Some of these Pauline knew; others had appeared, as it were, after her time. One was an Englishman, and she presently became presented to him as the Earl of Glenartney. The title struck her as beautiful, appealing to her sense of the romantic and picturesque; but she wondered that it had done so when she subsequently bent a closer gaze upon the receding forehead, flaccid mouth and lank frame of the Earl himself. He had certainly as much hard prose about his appearance as poetry in his name. Mrs. Poughkeepsie beamed upon him in a sort of sidelong way all the time that he conversed with Sallie. A magnate of bountiful shirt-bosom and haughty profile claimed her full heed, but she failed to bestow it entirely; the presence of this unmarried Scotch peer at her child's elbow was too stirring an incident; her usual equanimity was in a delightful flutter; ambition had already begun its insidious whispers, for the Earl was known to be still a bachelor.

Pauline, who read her aunt so thoroughly, felt the mockery of this maternal deference. She told herself that there was something dreary and horrible about a state of human worldliness which could thus idolize mere rank and place. She knew well enough that so long as Lord Glenartney were not a complete idiot, and so long as his moral character escaped the worst depravity, he would be esteemed a magnificent match for her cousin.

The Earl remained at Sallie's side all through the succeeding act. When the curtain again fell he still remained, while other gentlemen took the places of those now departing. And among these, to her surprise and pleasure, was Ralph Kindelon.

She almost rose as she extended her hand to her friend. A defiant satisfaction had suddenly thrilled her. She pronounced Kindelon's name quite loudly as she presented him to her aunt. Instead of merely bowing to Mrs. Poughkeepsie, Kindelon, with effusive cordiality, put forth his hand. Pauline saw a startled look creep across her aunt's face. The handsome massive-framed Irishman was not clad in evening dress. He towered above all the other gentlemen; he seemed, as indeed he almost was, like a creature of another species. His advent made an instant sensation; a universal stare was levelled upon him by these sleek devotees of fashion, among whom he had the air of pushing his way with a presumptuous geniality. He carried a soft "wide-awake" hat in one hand; his clothes were of some dark gray stuff; his neatly but heavily booted feet made dull sounds upon the floor as he now moved backward in search of a chair. There was no possible doubt regarding his perfect self-possession; he had evidently come to remain and to assert himself.

"Who on earth is he?" Mrs. Poughkeepsie found a chance to swiftly whisper in the ear of her niece. There was an absolutely dramatic touch in the agitation which went with her questioning sentence.

Pauline looked steadily at her aunt as she responded: "A very valued friend of mine."

"But, my dear!" faltered Mrs. Poughkeepsie. The fragmentary little vocative conveyed a volume of patrician dismay.

By this time Kindelon had found a chair. He placed it close to Pauline.

"I am so very glad that you discovered me," said Pauline. She spoke in quite loud tones, while everybody listened. Her words had the effect of a distinct challenge, and as such she intended them.

"I am flinging down a gauntlet," she thought, "to snobbery and conservatism. This slight event marks a positive era in my life."

"I saw you from the orchestra," now said Kindelon, in his heartiest tones. "The distance revealed you to me, though I cannot say it lent the least enchantment, for that would surely be impossible." He now looked towards Mrs. Poughkeepsie, without a trace of awe in his mirthful expression. "You must pardon my gallantry, madam," he proceeded. "Your niece and I, though recent friends, are yet old ones. We have crossed the Atlantic together, and that, in the winter season, is a wondrous promoter of intimacy, as you perhaps know. Perhaps Mrs. Varick has already done me the honor of mentioning our acquaintance."

"Not until now," said Mrs. Poughkeepsie, with a smile that had the glitter of ice in it.

IV

The orchestra had not yet recommenced, and the curtain would not reascend for at least ten good minutes. A vigorous babble of many voices rose from the many upstairs boxes. In some of these Kindelon's appearance might not have created the least comment. Here it was a veritable bombshell.

The "Poughkeepsie set" was famed for its rigid exclusiveness. Wherever Miss Sallie and her mother went, a little train of courtiers invariably followed them. They always represented an ultra-select circle inside of the larger and still decidedly aristocratic one. Only certain young men ever presumed to approach Sallie at all, and these were truly the darlings of fortune and fashion – young gentlemen of admitted ascendancy, whose attentions would have made an obscure girl rapidly prominent, and who, while often distinguished for admirable manners, always contrived to hover near those who were the sovereign reverse of obscure. They would carry only her bouquets, or those of other girls who belonged to the same special and envied clique; they would "take out in the German" only Sallie and her particular intimates. Bitter jealousies among the contemplating dowagers were often a result of this determined eclecticism. "Why *is* it that my Kate has to put up with so many second-rate men?" would pass with tormenting persistence through the mind of this matron. "Why can't my Caroline get any of the great swells to notice her?" would drearily haunt another. And between these two distressed ladies there might meanwhile be seated a third, whose daughter, for reasons of overwhelming wealth or particular attractiveness, always moved clad in a nimbus of sanctity.

Pauline was perfectly well aware that the coming of her friend had seemed an audacity, and that his unconventionally garrulous tongue was now regarded as a greater one. Courtlandt may have told her that the rival factions had cemented their differences and that all society in New York was more democratic than formerly. Still, it was unimaginable that her aunt Cynthia could ever really change her spots. Where she trod, there, too, must float the aroma of an individual self-glorification. Pauline was as much delighted by Kindelon's easy daring as by the almost glacial answer of her stately kinswoman; and she at once hastened to say, while looking with a smile at the unembarrassed Kindelon himself, —

"I have scarcely had a chance to tell either my aunt or my cousin how good you were to me on the 'Bothnia.'" Then she lifted her fan, and waved it prettily toward Sallie. "This *is* my cousin, Miss Poughkeepsie," she went on; she did not wait for the slow accomplishment of Sallie's forced and freezing bow, but at once added: "and here is Lord Glenartney, here Mr. Fyshkille, here Mr. Van Arsdale, here Mr. Hackensack. Now, I think you know us all, Mr. Kindelon."

As she ended her little speech she met Mrs. Poughkeepsie's eyes fixed upon her in placid consternation. Of course this wholesale introduction, among the chance occupants of an opera box, was a most unprecedented violation of usage. But that was precisely Pauline's wish – to violate usage, if she could do it without recourse to any merely vulgar rupture. They had all stared at Ralph Kindelon, had treated him as if he were some curious animal instead of a fellow-creature greatly their own superior, and they should have a chance now of discovering just how well he could hold his own in their little self-satisfied assemblage.

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