ALGER HORATIO JR.

THE DISAGREEABLE WOMAN

Horatio Alger

The Disagreeable Woman

Alger H.

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Содержание

Jr. Horatio Alger
The Disagreeable Woman / A Social Mystery

"Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still."

—Fletcher.

CHAPTER I.
A SOCIAL MYSTERY

"If I live till next July, I shall be twenty-nine years old," simpered the young widow, and she looked around the table, as if to note the effect of such an incredible statement.

"You look much older," said the Disagreeable Woman, looking up from her tea and buttered toast.

There was a general silence, and the boarders noted with curiosity the effect of this somewhat unceremonious remark.

Mrs. Wyman, the young widow, flushed and directed an angry and scornful look at the last speaker.

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you," she said.

"You are quite welcome," said the Disagreeable Woman, calmly.

"You look older than I do," said the widow, sharply.

"Very possibly," said the Disagreeable Woman, not at all excited.

"Do you mind telling us how old you are?"

"Not at all! I have reached the age—"

All bent forward to listen. Why is it that we take so much interest in the ages of our acquaintances? There was evidently a strong desire to learn the age of the Disagreeable Woman. But she disappointed the general expectation.

"I have reached the age of discretion," she continued, finishing the sentence.

"Who is that woman?" I asked my next neighbor, for I was a new comer at Mrs. Gray's table.

"Wait till after breakfast and I will tell you," he answered.

Mrs. Gray kept a large boarding-house on Waverley Place. Some fifteen boarders were gathered about the large table. I may have occasion to refer to some of them later. But first I will speak of myself.

I was a young medical practitioner, who after practising for a year in a Jersey village had come to New York in quest of a metropolitan practise and reputation. I was not quite penniless, having five hundred dollars left over from the legacy of an old aunt, the rest of which had been used to defray the expenses of my education. I had not yet come to realize how small a sum this was for a professional start in the city. I had hired an office, provided with a cabinet bedstead, and thus saved room rent. For table board I had been referred to Mrs. Gray's boarding-house, on Waverley Place.

"I boarded there once," said the friend who recommended me, "and found not only a fair table but a very social and entertaining family of boarders. They were of all classes," he continued, "from literateurs to dry goods clerks, school-teachers, actors, and broken-down professionals."

This description piqued my curiosity, and I enrolled myself as one of Mrs. Gray's boarders, finding her terms not beyond my modest means.

But in his list of boarders he forgot—the Disagreeable Woman, who must have come after his departure.

She was tall, inclined to be slender, with a keen face and singular eyes. She never seemed to be excited, but was always calm and self-possessed. She seemed to have keen insight into character, and as may already be inferred, of remarkable and even perhaps rude plainness of speech. Yet though she said sharp things she never seemed actuated by malice or ill-nature. She did not converse much, but was always ready to rebuke pretension and humbug as in the case of the young widow. What she said of her was quite correct. I judged from her appearance that Mrs. Wyman must be at least thirty-five years old, and possibly more. She evidently did not intend to remain a widow longer than was absolutely necessary.

She paid attention to every male boarder at the table, neglecting none. She even made overtures to Prof. Poppendorf, a learned German, with a deep bass voice and a German accent, whose green goggles and shaggy hair, somewhat grizzled, made him a picturesque personality.

We all enjoyed the rebuff which Mrs. Wyman received from the Disagreeable Woman, though it made us slightly afraid of her lest our turns might come next.

But I am keeping my readers from my friend's promised account of the lady who had excited my curiosity.

CHAPTER II.
THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

"The first time I met the Disagreeable Woman," said my neighbor, who was a commercial traveler, "was on my return from a business trip. Looking about the table to see what changes had occurred in the family, I saw sitting opposite to me a woman of somewhat unusual appearance, whose caustic speech made her feared by the rest of the boarders. This was three months since."

"What is her name?" I asked.

"Upon my word," he answered reflectively, "I am so accustomed to hear her spoken of as the Disagreeable Woman that I hardly remember. Let me see—yes, it is Blagden."

"And the first name?"

"Jane."

"Is it Miss or Mrs. Blagden?"

"I don't know."

"She has been here three months and you do not know," I said, in surprise.

"Precisely."

"Did it never occur to any one to ask her?"

"Yes, Mrs. Wyman asked her one day."

"And what did she reply?"

"Whichever you please—it is quite immaterial."

"Do you think she has any reason to maintain secrecy on this point?"

"I think not. She probably takes the ground that it is nobody's business but her own."

"How soon did she obtain her designation of the 'Disagreeable Woman?'"

"Almost immediately I judge. When I first met her she had been a member of Mrs. Gray's household for a week, and already this was the way she was spoken of."

"I suppose she does not live in the house?"

"No."

"Where then?"

"No one knows. She comes to her meals punctually, turning into Waverley Place from Broadway."

"Has no one ever thought of following her home?"

"Yes. A young broker's clerk, on a wager, attempted to track her to her lodging place. She was sharp enough to detect his purpose. When they reached Broadway she turned suddenly and confronted him. 'Are you going up or down Broadway?' she asked. 'Up Broadway,' he answered with some hesitation, 'Then good evening! I go in the opposite direction.' Of course there was nothing for him to do but to accept the hint, which was certainly pointed enough."

"She must be a woman with a history," I said, thoughtfully.

"Most women have histories."

"But not out of the common."

"True. What now do you conjecture as to Miss Blagden's history?"

"I am utterly at a loss."

"Do you think she has had a disappointment?"

"She does not look impressionable. One cannot conceive of her as having an affair of the heart."

"I don't know. One cannot always judge by the exterior."

"Do you think she has any employment?"

"If so, no one has been able to conjecture what it is."

"To me she seems like an advocate of Woman's Rights, perhaps a lecturer on that subject."

"Possibly, but I know of nothing to throw light on her business or her views."

"Do you think she is a woman of means?"

"Ah," said my friend, smiling, "you are really beginning to show interest in her. I believe you are unmarried?"

The suggestion was grotesque and I could not help smiling.

"I should pity the man who married the 'Disagreeable Woman,'" I made answer.

"I don't know. She is not beautiful, certainly, nor attractive, but I don't think she is as ill-natured as she appears."

"Is this conjecture on your part?"

"Not wholly. Did you notice the young woman who sat on her left?"

"Yes."

"We know her as the young woman from Macy's. Well, a month since she was sick for a week, and unable to pay her board. She occupies a hall bed-room on the upper floor. Miss Blagden guessed her trouble, and as she left the table on Saturday night put into her hands an envelope without a word. When it was opened it proved to contain ten dollars, sufficient to pay two weeks' board."

"Come, there seems to be something human about the Disagreeable Woman."

"Just so. To us it was a revelation. But she would not allow herself to be thanked."

"That last piece of information interests me. My office practise at present is very limited, and I find my small capital going fast. I may need the good office of Miss Blagden."

"I hope not, but I must leave you. My employers have sent me an orchestra ticket to Palmer's theatre."

"I hope you will enjoy yourself."

So we parted company. I went to my office, and spent a part of the evening in searching among my medical books for some light on a case that had baffled me. But from time to time my attention was distracted by thoughts of the Disagreeable Woman.

CHAPTER III.
PROF. POPPENDORF

Dinner was nearly over. The dessert had been succeeded by a dish of withered russet apples, when Mrs. Gray, leaning forward a little, said: "If the boarders will kindly remain a short time, Prof. Poppendorf has an interesting communication to make."

The learned professor cleared his throat, removed his goggles for an instant, and after wiping them carefully with a red silk handkerchief, replaced them on a nose of large proportions.

"My friends," he said, "on Thursday next I am to deliver a lecture at Schiller Hall, on Second Avenue, and I hope I may have the honor of seeing you all present. The tickets are fifty cents."

"May I ask the subject of your lecture, Professor?" asked Mrs. Wyman, with an appearance of interest.

"I shall lecture on 'The Material and the Immaterial,'" answered the Professor, in a deep bass voice.

The boarders looked puzzled. The announcement of the subject did not seem to excite interest.

"Shall you treat the subject in a popular manner, Prof. Poppendorf?" asked the Disagreeable Woman, in a tone that did not necessarily suggest sarcasm.

Prof. Poppendorf seemed puzzled.

"I do not know!" he answered, "if it will be popular—I hope it will be instructive."

"Will there be any jokes in it, Professor?" asked Sam Lindsay, a vocalist from an uptown Dime Museum.

"Jokes!" repeated the Professor, evidently scandalized. "It would not be appropriate. The subject is metaphysical. If you want jokes you must go to the variety theatre."

"True," said Lindsay, "or to the Dime Museums. We've got a man at our place who will make you split your sides laughing."

"I have here some tickets," continued the Professor, "some tickets which I shall be glad to dispose of in advance," and he drew out a package of perhaps twenty-five. "Miss Blagden, I hope you will patronize me."

"You may give me two," said the Disagreeable Woman, drawing a dollar bill from her pocket, and passing it to the Professor.

"You take two tickets?" said Mrs. Wyman, with a knowing smile. "I suppose there is a gentleman in the case."

"You are mistaken," said the Disagreeable Woman, quietly.

"You don't want both tickets for yourself, surely?"

"No, I shall use neither of them."

"You will give them away, then?"

"I do not think so."

"Why, then—"

"Why then do I buy them? Out of compliment to our friend, Prof. Poppendorf, who, I hope, will win a success."

"I thank you," said the Professor, "but I should be glad to have you honor my lecture with your presence."

"I feel no particular interest in 'The Material and the Immaterial,'" said Mrs. Blagden. "Besides I am not sure whether I should get any clearer ideas respecting them from attending your lecture."

"You do not flatter the Professor," said Mrs. Wyman, appearing shocked.

"No, I never flatter any one. Why should I?" returned the Disagreeable Woman.

"I like to be flattered," said the widow, simpering. "I like to be told that I am young and charming."

"Even if you are not."

Mrs. Wyman colored, and looked annoyed. She evidently did not care to continue her conversation with the Disagreeable Woman.

"Professor Poppendorf," she said, "will you allow me to suggest something which will enable you to sell a good many tickets?"

"I should be very glad to hear," said the Professor, eagerly.

"Get Chauncey M. Depew to preside, and introduce you to the audience."

"I did ask him, but he could not come. He is engaged to preside at a dinner given to the Yale Football Team."

"Does Mr. Depew kick football?" asked the young woman from Macy's.

"I think not," I ventured to say. "Gentlemen over forty seldom indulge in athletics."

"I am so sorry you can't get Mr. Depew," said Mrs. Wyman. "I should so like to hear him."

"You will hear *me*," said Prof. Poppendorf, with dignity, "if you will kindly buy a ticket."

Mrs. Wyman looked embarrassed. She had a fair income, but carried economy to a fine point.

"Perhaps," she said, with a hesitating glance at the person of whom she spoke, "Miss Blagden will give me one of her tickets, as she does not intend to use either."

"That wouldn't help the Professor," said Miss Blagden, quietly. "You had better buy one of him."

The Professor evidently approved this suggestion.

Mrs. Wyman reluctantly drew from her pocket forty-five cents in change, and tendered it to the Professor.

"I will owe you a nickel," she said.

"You can pay it any time, my dear lady," said the Professor, politely, as he passed a ticket to the widow.

Nearly all at the table took tickets, but the young woman from Macy's was not of the number. The price was small, but she needed gloves, and could not spare even fifty cents.

"Prof. Poppendorf," said a young man, who was attached as a reporter to one of the great morning dailies, "did I not hear you say once that you knew Bismarck?"

"Ah! yes," said the Professor, "I was at the University with Bismarck."

"How nice!" said Mrs. Wyman, with girlish enthusiasm. "It must have been a great privilege."

"I don't know," said Prof. Poppendorf, deliberately. "Bismarck was not a great student. He would not study. Bismarck was wild."

"Did he drink beer?" asked the widow.

"Of course," answered the Professor, surprised; "why should he not? I drank beer myself."

"Is it possible? I would not have believed it. Fie, Professor!"

"Beer is a very good thing," said the Professor, gravely. "There were not many of the students who could drink as much as Bismarck."

"And did Bismarck care for young ladies?"

"I should think so. I had a duel with Bismarck myself about a young *mädchen*."

More than one of the boarders smiled. It was so difficult to associate the gray old Professor with anything that savored of gallantry.

"Oh, yes," he continued, "Bismarck was the devil among the girls."

"Oh, Professor, I am shocked! You should not use such a word as devil at the table."

"What, then, do you call him?" asked Prof. Poppendorf.

"He is not mentioned in polite society. But tell us about the duel—were you wounded?"

"You see that scar," said the Professor, pointing to a slight disfigurement of his left cheek. "That was given me by Bismarck."

"Oh, how interesting! It is almost like seeing Bismarck himself."

"Prof. Poppendorf," said the Disagreeable Woman, "why do you not lecture on Bismarck, instead of the dry subject you have announced?"

"You admire Bismarck, then, my dear lady?"

"Not at all."

"But I don't understand."

"The people are interested in him. They don't care for the 'Material and the Immaterial.'"

"That is a good suggestion, Professor," said the widow. "I would much rather hear about Bismarck. *I* admire him. Why do you not, Miss Blagden?"

"Because he was a second-hand autocrat," said the Disagreeable Woman.

"Again I do not understand," said the Professor.

"He was the servant of the Emperor. His authority did not come from the people."

There was some further conversation, and Prof. Poppendorf promised that his next lecture should be upon Bismarck.

CHAPTER IV.
PROF. POPPENDORF'S LECTURE

We all sat at supper on Thursday evening. There was a general air of expectation. It was on this evening that Prof. Poppendorf was to give his lecture. We all gazed at him with more than ordinary interest. The old Professor, gray and grim-visaged, sat more than usually erect, and his manner and bearing were marked by unusual dignity. He felt himself to be the hero of the hour.

I have neglected to say that Mrs. Wyman had been transferred to the seat adjoining mine. As she could not do without masculine attention I suspect that this arrangement was prompted by herself. Henceforth I was favored with the greater part of her conversation.

"I am quite looking forward to Prof. Poppendorf's lecture!" she said. "You are going, are you not?"

"I think so, but I can't say I am looking forward to it. I fancy it will be dry and difficult to understand."

"You think he is a learned man, do you not?"

"Very probably—in certain directions."

"Dr. Fenwick, I am going to ask a favor of you."

"I hope it isn't money," thought I, "for I was beginning to have some anxiety about my steadily dwindling bank account."

"Name it, Mrs. Wyman," I said, somewhat nervously.

"I am almost ashamed to say it, but I don't like to go to the lecture alone. Would you mind giving me your escort?"

"With pleasure," I answered.

My answer was not quite truthful, for I had intended to ask the young woman from Macy's to accompany me. She was not intellectual, but she had a fresh, country face and complexion; she came from Pomfret, Connecticut, and was at least ten years younger than Mrs. Wyman. But what could I say? I had not the moral courage to refuse a lady.

"Thank you very much. Now I shall look forward to the evening with pleasure."

"You are complimentary. Do you expect to understand the lecture?"

"I don't know. I never gave much thought to the 'Material and Immaterial.'"

"Possibly we may understand as much about the subject as the Professor himself."

"Oh, how severe you are! Now I have great faith in the Professor's learning."

"He ought to be learned. He certainly has no physical beauty."

Mrs. Wyman laughed.

"I suppose few learned men are handsome," she said.

"Then perhaps I may console myself for having so little learning. Do you think the same rule holds good with ladies?"

"To a certain extent. I am sure the principal of the seminary I attended was frightfully plain; but I am sure she was learned. Prof. Poppendorf, have you sold many lecture tickets?"

"Quite a few!" answered the Professor, vaguely.

"Are you going to attend the lecture, Miss Blagden?" asked the widow.

"Miss Canby and I have agreed to go together."

Miss Canby was the young woman from Macy's. The Disagreeable Woman finding that she wished to attend the lecture, offered her a ticket and her company, both being thankfully accepted. So that after all my escort was not needed by the young woman, and I lost nothing by my attention to the widow.

We did not rise from the table till seven o'clock. Mrs. Wyman excused herself for a short time. She wished to dress for the lecture. The gentlemen withdrew to the reception room, a small and very narrow room on one side of the hall, and waited for the ladies to appear. Among those who seated themselves there was the Disagreeable Woman. She waited for the appearance of the young woman from Macy's, whom she was to accompany to the lecture. Somehow she did not seem out of place in the assemblage of men.

"You did not at first propose to hear Prof. Poppendorf?" I remarked.

"No; I shall not enjoy it. But I found Miss Canby wished to attend."

"We shall probably know a good deal more about the Material and the Immaterial when we return."

"Possibly we shall know as much as the Professor himself," she answered, quietly.

"I am afraid you are no hero worshiper, Miss Blagden."

"Do you refer to the Professor as a hero?"

"He is the hero of this evening."

"Perhaps so. We will see."

Prof. Poppendorf looked into the reception room previous to leaving the house. He wore a long coat, or surtout, as it used to be called—tightly buttoned around his spare figure. There was a rose in his buttonhole. I had never seen one there before, but then this was a special occasion. He seemed in good spirits, as one on the eve of a triumph. He was content with one comprehensive glance. Then he opened the front door, and went out.

Just then Mrs. Wyman tripped into the room, closely followed by Ruth Canby. The widow was quite radiant. I can't undertake to itemize her splendor. She looked like a social butterfly.

Quite in contrast with her was the young woman from Macy's, whose garb was almost Quaker-like in its simplicity. Mrs. Wyman surveyed her with a contemptuous glance, and no doubt mentally contrasted her plainness with her own showy apparel. But the Disagreeable Woman's eye seemed to rest approvingly on her young companion. They started out ahead of the rest of us.

"What a very plain person Miss Canby is!" said the widow, as we emerged into the street, her arm resting lightly in mine.

"Do you refer to her dress or her face and figure?"

"Well, to both."

"She dresses plainly; but I suspect that is dictated by economy. She has a pleasant face."

"It is the face of a peasant."

"I didn't know there were any peasants in America."

"Well, you understand what I mean. She looks like a country girl."

"Perhaps so, but is that an objection?"

"Few country girls are stylish."

"I don't myself care so much for style as for good health and a good heart."

"Really, Dr. Fenwick, your ideas are very old-fashioned. In that respect you resemble my dear, departed husband."

"Is it permitted to ask whether your husband has long been dead?"

"I have been a widow six years," said Mrs. Wyman, with an ostentatious sigh. "I was quite a girl when my dear husband died."

According to her own chronology, she was twenty-three. In all probability she became a widow at twenty-nine or thirty. But of course I could not insinuate any doubt of a lady's word.

"And you have never been tempted to marry again?" I essayed with great lack of prudence.

"Oh, Dr. Fenwick, do you think it would be right?" said the widow, leaning more heavily on my arm.

"If you should meet one who was congenial to you. I don't know why not."

"I have always thought that if I ever married again I would select a professional gentleman," murmured the widow.

I began to understand my danger and tried a diversion.

"I don't know if you would consider Prof. Poppendorf a 'professional gentleman'," I said.

"Oh, how horrid! Who would marry such an old fossil?"

"It is well that the Professor does not hear you."

Perhaps this conversation is hardly worth recording, but it throws some light on the character of the widow. Moreover it satisfied me that should I desire to marry her there would be no violent opposition on her part. But, truth to tell, I would have preferred the young woman from Macy's, despite the criticism of Mrs. Wyman. One was artificial, the other was natural.

We reached Schiller Hall, after a long walk. It was a small hall, looking something like a college recitation room.

Prof. Poppendorf took his place behind a desk on the platform and looked about him. There were scarcely a hundred persons, all told, in the audience. The men, as a general thing, were shabbily dressed, and elderly. There were perhaps twenty women, with whom dress was a secondary consideration.

"Did you ever see such frights, Doctor?" whispered the widow.

"You are the only stylishly dressed woman in the hall."

Mrs. Wyman looked gratified.

The Professor commenced a long and rather incomprehensible talk, in which the words material and immaterial occurred at frequent intervals. There may have been some in the audience who understood him, but I was not one of them.

"Do you understand him?" I asked the widow.

"Not wholly," she answered, guardedly.

I was forced to smile, for she looked quite bewildered.

The Professor closed thus: "Thus you will see, my friends, that much that we call material is immaterial, while *per contra*, that which is usually called immaterial is material."

"A very satisfactory conclusion," I remarked, turning to the widow.

"Quite so," she answered, vaguely.

"I thank you for your attention, my friends," said the Professor, with a bow.

There was faint applause, in which I assisted.

The Professor looked gratified, and we all rose and quietly left the hall. I walked out behind Miss Canby and the Disagreeable Woman.

"How did you like the lecture, Miss Blagden?" I inquired.

"Probably as much as you did," she answered, dryly.

"What do you think of the Professor, now?"

"He seems to know a good deal that isn't worth knowing."

CHAPTER V.
A CONVERSATION WITH THE DISAGREEABLE WOMAN

One afternoon between five and six o'clock I was passing the Star Theatre, when I overtook the Disagreeable Woman.

I had only exchanged a few remarks with her at the table, and scarcely felt acquainted. I greeted her, however, and waited with some curiosity to see what she would have to say to me.

"Dr. Fenwick, I believe?" she said.

"Yes; are you on your way to supper?"

"I am. Have you had a busy day?"

As she said this she looked at me sharply.

"I have had two patients, Miss Blagden. I am a young physician, and not well known yet. I advance slowly."

"You have practised in the country?"

"Yes."

"Pardon me, but would it not have been better to remain there, where you were known, than to come to a large city where you are as one of the sands of the sea?"

"I sometimes ask myself that question, but as yet I am unprepared with an answer. I am ambitious, and the city offers a much larger field."

"With a plenty of laborers already here."

"Yes."

"I suppose you have confidence in yourself?"

Again she eyed me sharply.

"Yes and no. I have a fair professional training, and this gives me some confidence. But sometimes, it would be greater if I had an extensive practise, I feel baffled, and shrink from the responsibility that a physician always assumes."

"I am glad to hear you say so," she remarked, approvingly. "Modesty is becoming in any profession. Do you feel encouraged by your success thus far?"

"I am gaining, but my progress seems slow. I have not yet reached the point when I am self-supporting."

She looked at me thoughtfully.

"Of course you would not have established yourself here if you had not a reserve fund to fall back upon? But perhaps I am showing too much curiosity."

"No, I do not regard it as curiosity, only as a kind interest in my welfare."

"You judge me right."

"I brought with me a few hundred dollars, Miss Blagden—what was left to me from the legacy of a good aunt—but I have already used a quarter of it, and every month it grows less."

"I feel an interest in young men—I am free to say this without any fear of being misunderstood, being an old woman—"

"An old woman?"

"Well, I am more than twenty-nine."

We both smiled, for this was the age that Mrs. Wyman owned up to.

"At any rate," she resumed, "I am considerably older than you. I will admit, Dr. Fenwick, that I am not a blind believer in the medical profession. There are some, even of those who have achieved a certain measure of success, whom I look upon as solemn pretenders."

"Yet if you were quite ill you would call in a physician?"

"Yes. I am not quite foolish enough to undertake to doctor myself in a serious illness. But I would repose unquestioning faith in no one, however eminent."

"I don't think we shall disagree on that point. A physician understands his own limitations better than any outsider."

"Come, I think you will do," she said, pleasantly. "If I am ill at any time I shall probably call you in."

"Thank you."

"And I should criticise your treatment. If you gave me any bread pills, I should probably detect the imposture."

"I should prefer, as a patient, bread pills to many that are prescribed."

"You seem to be a sensible man, Dr. Fenwick. I shall hope to have other opportunities of conversing with you. Let me know from time to time how you are succeeding."

"Thank you. I am glad you are sufficiently interested in me to make the request."

By this time we had reached the boarding-house. We could see Mrs. Wyman at the window of the reception room. She was evidently surprised and amused to see us together. I was sure that I should hear more of it, and I was not mistaken.

"Oh, Dr. Fenwick," she said playfully, as she took a seat beside me at the table. "I caught you that time."

"I don't understand you," I said, innocently.

"Oh, yes, you do. Didn't I see you and Miss Blagden coming in together?"

"Yes."

"I thought you would confess. Did you have a pleasant walk?"

"It was only from the Star Theatre."

"I see you are beginning to apologize. You could say a good deal between Waverley Place and the Star Theatre."

"We did."

"So I thought. I suppose you were discussing your fellow boarders, including poor me."

"Not at all."

"Then my name was not mentioned?"

"Yes, I believe you were referred to."

"What did she say about me?" inquired the widow, eagerly.

"Only that she was older than you."

"Mercy, I should think she was. Why, she's forty if she's a day. Don't you think so?"

"I am no judge of ladies' ages."

"I am glad you are not. Not that I am sensitive about my own. I am perfectly willing to own that I am twenty seven."

"I thought you said twenty-nine, the other evening?"

"True, I am twenty-nine, but I said twenty-seven to see if you would remember. I suppose gentlemen are never sensitive about their ages."

"I don't know. I am twenty-six, and wish I were thirty-six."

"Mercy, what a strange wish! How can you possibly wish that you were older."

"Because I could make a larger income. It is all very well to be a young minister, but a young doctor does not inspire confidence."

"I am sure I would rather call in a young doctor unless I were *very* sick."

"There it is! Unless you were very sick."

"But even then," said the widow, coquettishly, "I am sure I should feel confidence in you, Dr. Fenwick. You wouldn't prescribe very nasty pills, would you?"

"I would order bread pills, if I thought they would answer the purpose."

"That would be nice. But you haven't answered my question. What were you and Miss Blagden talking about?"

"About doctors; she hasn't much faith in men of my profession."

"Or of any other, I fancy. What do you think of her?"

"That is a leading question, Mrs. Wyman; I haven't thought very much about her so far, I have thought more of you."

"Oh, you naughty flatterer!" said the widow, graciously. "Not that I believe you. Men are such deceivers."

"Do ladies never deceive?"

"You ought to have been a lawyer, you ask such pointed questions. Really, Dr. Fenwick, I am quite afraid of you."

"There's no occasion. I am quite harmless, I do assure you. The time to be afraid of me is when you call me in as a physician."

"Excuse me, doctor, but Mrs. Gray is about to make an announcement."

We both turned our glances upon the landlady.

CHAPTER VI.
COUNT PENELLI

Mrs. Gray was a lady of the old school. She was the widow of a merchant supposed to be rich, and in the days of her magnificence had lived in a large mansion on Fourteenth Street, and kept her carriage. When her husband died suddenly of apoplexy his fortune melted away, and she found herself possessed of expensive tastes, and a pittance of *two* thousand dollars.

She was practical, however, and with a part of her money bought an old established boarding-house on Waverley Place. This she had conducted for ten years, and it yielded her a good income. Her two thousand dollars had become ten, and her future was secure.

Mrs. Gray did not class herself among boarding-house keepers. Her boarders she regarded as her family, and she felt a personal interest in each and all. When they became too deeply in arrears, they received a quiet hint, and dropped out of the pleasant home circle. But this did not happen very often.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.