

Howells William Dean

**A Counterfeit Presentment; and,  
The Parlour Car**



William Howells

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**Howells W.**

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# William Dean Howells A Counterfeit Presentment; and, The Parlour Car

## I. AN EXTRAORDINARY RESEMBLANCE. A COUNTERFEIT PRESENTMENT

(The Scene is always in the Parlour of the Ponkwasset Hotel.)

### I

#### *Bartlett and Cummings*

ON a lovely day in September, at that season when the most sentimental of the young maples have begun to redden along the hidden courses of the meadow streams, and the elms, with a sudden impression of despair in their languor, betray flecks of yellow on the green of their pendulous boughs, – on such a day at noon, two young men enter the parlour of the Ponkwasset Hotel, and deposit about the legs of the piano the burdens they have been carrying: a camp-stool namely, a field-easel, a closed box of colours, and a canvas to which, apparently, some portion of reluctant nature has just been transferred. These properties belong to one of the young men, whose general look and bearing readily identify him as their owner: he has a quick, somewhat furtive eye, a full brown beard, and hair that falls in a careless mass down his forehead, which, as he dries it with his handkerchief, sweeping the hair aside, shows broad and white; his figure is firm and square, without heaviness, and in his movement as well as in his face there is something of stubbornness, with a suggestion of arrogance. The other, who has evidently borne his share of the common burdens from a sense of good comradeship, has nothing of the painter in him, nor anything of this painter's peculiar temperament: he has a very abstracted look and a dark, dreaming eye: he is pale, and does not look strong. The painter flings himself into a rocking chair and draws a long breath.

*Cummings* (for that is the name of the slighter man, who remains standing as he speaks). – "It's warm, isn't it?" His gentle face evinces a curious and kindly interest in his friend's sturdy demonstrations of fatigue.

*Bartlett.* – "Yes, hot – confoundedly." He rubs his handkerchief vigorously across his forehead, and then looks down at his dusty shoes, with apparently no mind to molest them in their dustiness. "The idea of people going back to town in this weather! However, I'm glad they're such asses; it gives me free scope here. Every time I don't hear some young woman banging on that piano, I fall into transports of joy."

*Cummings*, smiling. – "And after to-day you won't be bothered even with me."

*Bartlett.* – "Oh, I shall rather miss you, you know. I like somebody to contradict."

*Cummings.* – "You can contradict the ostler."

*Bartlett.*— "No, I can't. They've sent him away; and I believe you're going to carry off the last of the table-girls with you in the stage to-morrow. The landlord and his wife are to run the concern themselves the rest of the fall. Poor old fellow! The hard times have made lean pickings for him this year. His house wasn't full in the height of the season, and it's been pretty empty since."

*Cummings.*— "I wonder he doesn't shut up altogether."

*Bartlett.*— "Well, there are a good many transients, as they call them, at this time of year, — fellows who drive over from the little hill-towns with their girls in buggies, and take dinner and supper; then there are picnics from the larger places, ten and twelve miles off, that come to the grounds on the pond, and he always gets something out of them. And as long as he can hope for anything else, my eight dollars a week are worth hanging on to. Yes, I think I shall stay here all through October. I've got no orders, and it's cheap. Besides, I've managed to get on confidential terms with the local scenery; I thought we should like each other last summer, and I feel now that we're ready to swear eternal friendship. I shall do some fairish work here, yet. Phew!" He mops his forehead again, and springing out of his chair he goes up to the canvas, which he has faced to the wall, and turning it about retires some paces, and with a swift, worried glance at the windows falls to considering it critically.

*Cummings.*— "You've done some fairish work already, if I'm any judge." He comes to his friend's side, as if to get his effect of the picture. "I don't believe the spirit of a graceful elm that just begins to feel the approach of autumn was ever better interpreted. There is something tremendously tragical to me in the thing. It makes me think of some lovely and charming girl, all grace and tenderness, who finds the first grey hair in her head. I should call that picture *The First Grey Hair*."

*Bartlett*, with unheeding petulance. — "The whole thing's too infernally brown! I beg your pardon, Cummings: what were you saying? Go on! I like your prattle about pictures; I do, indeed. I like to see how far you art-cultured fellows can miss all that was in a poor devil's mind when he was at work. But I'd rather you'd sentimentalise my pictures than moralise them. If there's anything that makes me quite limp, it's to have an allegory discovered in one of my poor stupid old landscapes. But *The First Grey Hair* isn't bad, really. And a good, senseless, sloppy name like that often sells a picture."

*Cummings.*— "You're brutal, Bartlett. I don't believe your pictures would own you, if they had their way about it."

*Bartlett.*— "And I wouldn't own *them* if I had *mine*. I've got about forty that I wish somebody else owned — and I had the money for them; but we seem inseparable. Glad you're going to-morrow? You *are* a good fellow, Cummings, and I *am* a brute. Come, I'll make a great concession to friendship: it struck me, too, while I was at work on that elm, that it was something like — an old girl!" Bartlett laughs, and catching his friend by either shoulder, twists him about in his strong clutch, while he looks him merrily in the face. "I'm not a poet, old fellow; and sometimes I think I ought to have been a painter and glazier instead of a mere painter. I believe it would have paid better."

*Cummings.*— "Bartlett, I hate to have you talk in that way."

*Bartlett.*— "Oh, I know it's a stale kind."

*Cummings.*— "It's worse than stale. It's destructive. A man can soon talk himself out of heart with his better self. You can end by really being as sordid-minded and hopeless and low-purposed as you pretend to be. It's insanity."

*Bartlett.*— "Good! I've had my little knock on the head, you know. I don't deny being cracked. But I've a method in my madness."

*Cummings.*— "They all have. But it's a very poor method; and I don't believe you could say just what yours is. You think because a girl on whom you set your fancy — it's nonsense to pretend it was your heart — found out she didn't like you as well as she thought, and honestly told you so in good time, that your wisest course is to take up that rôle of misanthrope which begins with yourself and leaves people to imagine how low an opinion you have of the rest of mankind."

*Bartlett.*— "My dear fellow, you know I always speak well of that young lady. I've invariably told you that she behaved in the handsomest manner. She even expressed the wish – I distinctly remember being struck by the novelty of the wish at the time – that we should remain friends. You misconceive"

*Cummings.*— "How many poor girls have been jilted who don't go about doing misanthropy, but mope at home and sorrow and sicken over their wrong in secret, – a wrong that attacks not merely their pride, but their life itself. Take the case I was telling you of: did you ever hear of anything more atrocious? And do you compare this little sting to your vanity with a death-blow like that?"

*Bartlett.*— "It's quite impossible to compute the number of jilted girls who take the line you describe. But if it were within the scope of arithmetic, I don't know that a billion of jilted girls would comfort me or reform me. I never could regard myself in that abstract way – a mere unit on one side or other of the balance. My little personal snub goes on rankling beyond the reach of statistical consolation. But even if there were any edification in the case of the young lady in Paris, she's too far off to be an example for me. Take some jilted girl nearer home, Cummings, if you want me to go round sickening and sorrowing in secret. I don't believe you can find any. Women are much tougher about the pericardium than we give them credit for, my dear fellow, – much. I don't see why it should hurt a woman more than a man to be jilted. We shall never truly philosophise this important matter till we regard women with something of the fine penetration and impartiality with which they regard each other. Look at the stabs they give and take – they would kill men! And the graceful ferocity with which they despatch any of their number who happens to be down is quite unexampled in natural history. How much do you suppose her lady friends have left of that poor girl whose case wrings your foolish bosom all the way from Paris? I don't believe so much as a boot-button. Why, even your correspondent – a very lively woman, by the way – can't conceal under all her indignation her little satisfaction that so *proud* a girl as Miss What's-her-name should have been jilted. Of course, she doesn't say it."

*Cummings* hotly. – "No, she doesn't say it, and it's not to your credit to imagine it."

*Bartlett*, with a laugh. – "Oh, I don't ask any praise for the discovery. You deserve praise for not making it. It does honour to your good heart. Well, don't be vexed, old fellow. And in trying to improve me on this little point – a weak point, I'll allow, with me – do me the justice to remember that I didn't flaunt my misanthropy, as you call it, in your face; I didn't force my confidence upon you."

*Cummings*, with compunction. – "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, Bartlett."

*Bartlett.*— "Well, you haven't. It's all right."

*Cummings*, with anxious concern. – "I wish I could think so."

*Bartlett*, dryly. – "You have *my* leave – my request, in fact." He takes a turn about the room, thrusting his fingers through the hair on his forehead, and letting it fall in a heavy tangle, and then pulling at either side of his parted beard. In facing away from one of the sofas at the end of the room, he looks back over his shoulder at it, falters, wheels about, and picks up from it a lady's shawl and hat. "Hallo!" He lets the shawl fall again into picturesque folds on the sofa. "This is the spoil of no local beauty, Cummings. Look here; I don't understand this. There has been an arrival."

*Cummings*, joining his friend in contemplation of the hat and shawl: "Yes; it's an arrival beyond all question. Those are a *lady's* things. I should think that was a Paris hat." They remain looking at the things some moments in silence.

*Bartlett.*— "How should a Paris hat get here? I know the landlord wasn't expecting it. But it can't be going to stay; it's here through some caprice. It may be a transient of quality, but it's a transient. I suppose we shall see the young woman belonging to it at dinner." He sets the hat on his fist, and holds it at arm's length from him. "What a curious thing it is about clothes" —

*Cummings.*— "Don't, Bartlett, don't!"

*Bartlett.*— "Why?"

*Cummings.*— "I don't know. It makes me feel as if you were offering an indignity to the young lady herself."

*Bartlett.*— "You express my idea exactly. This frippery has not only the girl's personality but her very spirit in it. This hat looks like her; you can infer the whole woman from it, body and soul. It has a conscious air, and so has the shawl, as if they had been eavesdropping and had understood everything we were saying. They know all about my heart-break, and so will she as soon as she puts them on; she will be interested in me. The hat's in good taste, isn't it?"

*Cummings,* with sensitive reverence for the millinery which his friend handles so daringly. — "Exquisite it seems to me; but I don't know about such things."

*Bartlett.*— "Neither do I; but I feel about them. Besides, a painter and glazier sees some things that are hidden from even a progressive minister. Let us interpret the lovely being from her hat. This knot of pale-blue flowers betrays her a blonde; this lace, this mass of silky, fluffy, cob-webby what-do-you-call-it, and this delicate straw fabric show that she is slight; a stout woman would kill it, or die in the attempt. And I fancy — here pure inspiration comes to my aid — that she is tallish. I'm afraid of her! No — wait! The shawl has something to say." He takes it up and catches it across his arm, where he scans it critically. "I don't know that I understand the shawl, exactly. It proves her of a good height, — a short woman wouldn't, or had better not, wear a shawl, — but this black colour: should you think it was mourning? Have we a lovely young widow among us?"

*Cummings.*— "I don't see how it could go with the hat, if it were."

*Bartlett.*— "True; the hat is very pensive in tone, but it isn't mourning. This shawl's very light, it's very warm; I construct from it a pretty invalid." He lets the shawl slip down his arm to his hand, and flings it back upon the sofa. "We return from the young lady's heart to her brain — where she carries her sentiments. She has a nice taste in perfumes, Cummings: faintest violet; that goes with the blue. Of what religion is a young lady who uses violet, my reverend friend?"

*Cummings.*— "Bartlett, you're outrageous. Put down that hat!"

*Bartlett.*— "No, seriously. What is her little æsthetic specialty? Does she sketch? Does she scribble? Tell me, thou wicked hat, does she flirt? Come; out with the vows that you have heard poured into the shelly ear under this knot of pale-blue flowers! Where be her gibes now, her gambols, her flashes of merriment? Now get you to my lady's chamber, and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come; make her laugh at that. Dost thou think, Horatio Cummings, Cleopatra looked o' this fashion? And smelt so?" — he presses the knot of artificial flowers to his moustache — "Pah!" He tosses the hat on the sofa and walks away.

*Cummings.*— "Bartlett, this is atrocious. I protest" —

*Bartlett.*— "Well, give me up, I tell you." He returns, and takes his friend by the shoulders, as before, and laughs. "I'm not worth your refined pains. I might be good, at a pinch, but I never could be truly lady-like."

*Cummings.*— "You like to speak an infinite deal of nothing, don't you?"

*Bartlett.*— "It's the only thing that makes conversation." As he releases Cummings, and turns away from him, in the doorway he confronts an elderly gentleman, whose white hair and white moustache give distinction to his handsome florid face. There is something military in his port, as he stands immoveably erect upon the threshold, his left hand lodged in the breast of his frock-coat, and his head carried with an officer-like air of command. His visage grows momentarily redder and redder, and his blue eyes blaze upon Bartlett with a fascinated glare that briefly precludes the burst of fury with which he advances toward him.

## II

### General Wyatt, Bartlett, and Cummings

*General Wyatt.*— "You infernal scoundrel! What are you doing here?" He raises his stick at Bartlett, who remains motionlessly frowning in wrathful bewilderment, his strong hand knotting itself into a fist where it hangs at his side, while Cummings starts toward them in dismay, with his hand raised to interpose. "Didn't I tell you if I ever set eyes on you again, you villain – didn't I warn you that if you ever crossed my path, you" – He stops with a violent self-arrest, and lets his stick drop as he throws up both his hands in amaze. "Good Heavens! It's a mistake! I beg your pardon, sir; I do, indeed." He lets fall his hands, and stands staring into Bartlett's face with his illusion apparently not fully dispelled. "A mistake, sir, a mistake. I was misled, sir, by the most prodigious resemblance" – At the sound of voices in the corridor without, he turns from Bartlett, and starts back toward the door.

*A Voice,* very sweet and weak, without. – "I left them in here, I think."

*Another Voice.*— "You must sit down, Constance, and let me look."

*The First Voice.*— "Oh, they'll be here."

*General Wyatt.*, in a loud and anxious tone. – "Margaret, Margaret! Don't bring Constance in here! Go away!" At the moment he reaches the door by which he came in, two ladies in black enter the parlour by the other door, the younger leaning weakly on the arm of the elder, and with a languidly drooping head letting her eyes rove listlessly about over the chairs and sofas. With an abrupt start at sight of Bartlett, who has mechanically turned toward them, the elder lady arrests their movement.

## III

### Mrs. Wyatt, Constance, and the others

*Mrs. Wyatt.*— "Oh, in mercy's name!" The young lady wearily lifts her eyes; they fall upon Bartlett's face, and a low cry parts her lips as she approaches a pace or two nearer, releasing her arm from her mother's.

*Constance.*— "Ah!" She stops; her thin hands waver before her face, as if to clear or to obstruct her vision, and all at once she sinks forward into a little slender heap upon the floor, almost at Bartlett's feet. He instantly drops upon his knees beside her, and stoops over her to lift her up.

*Mrs. Wyatt.*— "Don't touch her, you cruel wretch! Your touch is poison; the sight of you is murder!" Kneeling on the other side of her daughter, she sets both her hands against his breast and pushes him back.

*General Wyatt.*— "Margaret, stop! Look! Look at him again! It isn't *he*!"

*Mrs. Wyatt.*— "Not he? Don't tell me! What?" She clutches Bartlett's arm, and scans his face with dilating eyes. "Oh! it isn't, it isn't! But go away, – go away, all the same! You may be an innocent man, but she would perish in your presence. Keep your hands from her, sir! If your wicked heart is not yet satisfied with your wicked work – Excuse me; I *don't* know what I'm saying! But if you have any pity in your faithless soul – I – oh, *speak* for me, James, and send him – implore him to go away!" She bows her face over her daughter's pale visage, and sobs.

*General Wyatt.*— "Sir, you must pardon us, and have the great goodness to be patient. You have a right to feel yourself aggrieved by what has happened, but no wrong is meant, – no offence. You must be so kind as to go away. I will make you all the needed apologies and explanations." He stoops

over his daughter, as Bartlett, in a sort of daze, rises from his knees and retires a few steps. "I beg your pardon, sir," – addressing himself to Cummings, – "will you help me a moment?" Cummings, with delicate sympathy and tenderness, lifts the arms of the insensible girl to her father's neck, and assists the General to rise with his burden. "Thanks! She's hardly heavier, poor child, than a ghost." The tears stand in his eyes, as he gathers her closer to him and kisses her wan cheek. "Sir," – as he moves away he speaks to Bartlett, – "do me the favour to remain here till I can return to offer you reparation." He makes a stately effort to bow to Bartlett in leaving the room, while his wife, who follows with the young lady's hat and shawl, looks back at the painter with open abhorrence.

#### IV

### **Bartlett and Cummings**

*Bartlett*, turning to his friend from the retreating group on which he has kept his eyes steadfastly fixed. – "Where are their keepers?" He is pale with suppressed rage.

*Cummings*.– "Their keepers?"

*Bartlett*, savagely. – "Yes! Have they escaped from them, or is it one of the new ideas to let lunatics go about the country alone? If that old fool hadn't dropped his stick, I'd have knocked him over that table in another instant. And that other old maniac, – what did she mean by pushing me back in that way? How do you account for this thing, Cummings? What do you make of it?"

*Cummings*.– "I don't know, upon my word. There seems to be some mystery, – some painful mystery. But the gentleman will be back directly, I suppose, and" —

*Bartlett*, crushing his hat over his eyes. – "I'll leave you to receive him and his mystery. I've had enough of both." He moves toward the door.

*Cummings*, detaining him. – "Bartlett, you're surely not going away?"

*Bartlett*.– "Yes, I am!"

*Cummings*.– "But he'll be here in a moment. He said he would come back and satisfy the claim which you certainly have to an explanation."

*Bartlett*, furiously. – "Claim? I've a perfect Alabama Claim to an explanation. He can't satisfy it; he shall not try. It's a little too much to expect me to be satisfied with anything he can say after what's passed. Get out of the way, Cummings, or I'll put you on top of the piano."

*Cummings*.– "You may throw me out of the window, if you like, but not till I've done my best to keep you here. It's a shame, it's a crime to go away. You talk about lunatics: you're a raving madman, yourself. Have one glimmer of reason, do; and see what you're about. It's a mistake; it's a misunderstanding. It's his right, it's your duty, to have it cleared up. Come, you've a conscience, Bartlett, and a clean one. Don't give way to your abominable temper. What? You won't stay? Bartlett, I blush for you!"

*Bartlett*.– "Blush unseen, then!" He thrusts Cummings aside and pushes furiously from the room. Cummings looks into the corridor after him, and then returns, panting, to the piano, and mechanically rearranges the things at his feet; he walks nervously away, and takes some turns up and down the room, looking utterly bewildered, and apparently uncertain whether to go or stay. But he has decided upon the only course really open to him by sinking down into one of the armchairs, when General Wyatt appears at the threshold of the door on the right of the piano. Cummings rises and comes forward in great embarrassment to meet him.

V

**Cummings and General Wyatt**

*General Wyatt*, with a look of surprise at not seeing Bartlett. – "The other gentleman" —

*Cummings*.— "My friend has gone out. I hope he will return soon. He has – I hardly know what to say to you, sir. He has done himself great injustice; but it was natural that under the circumstances" —

*General Wyatt*, with hurt pride. – "Perfectly. I should have lost my temper, too; but I think I should have waited at the request – the prayer of an older man. I don't mind his temper; the other villain had *no* temper. Sir, am I right in addressing you as the Rev. Arthur Cummings?"

*Cummings*.— "My name is Arthur Cummings. I am a minister."

*General Wyatt*.— "I thought I was not mistaken this time. I heard you preach last Sunday in Boston; and I know your cousin, Major Cummings of the 34th Artillery. I am General Wyatt."

*Cummings*, with a start of painful surprise and sympathy. – "General Wyatt?"

*General Wyatt*, keenly. – "Your cousin has mentioned me to you?"

*Cummings*.— "Yes, – oh yes, certainly; certainly, very often, General Wyatt. But" – endeavouring to recover himself – "your name is known to us all, and honoured. I – I am glad to see you back; I – understood you were in Paris."

*General Wyatt*, with fierce defiance. – "I was in Paris three weeks ago." Some moments of awkward silence ensue, during which General Wyatt does not relax his angry attitude.

*Cummings*, finally. – "I am sorry my friend is not here to meet you. I ought to say, in justice to him, that his hasty temper does great wrong to his heart and judgment."

*General Wyatt*.— "Why, yes, sir; so does mine – so does mine."

*Cummings*, with a respectful smile lost upon the General. – "And I know that he will certainly be grieved in this instance to have yielded to it."

*General Wyatt*, with sudden meekness. – "I hope so, sir. But I am not altogether sorry that he has done it. I have not only an explanation but a request to make, – a very great and strange favour to ask, – and I am not sure that I should be able to treat him civilly enough throughout an entire interview to ask it properly." Cummings listens with an air of attentive respect, but makes, to this strange statement, no response other than a look of question, while the General pokes about on the carpet at his feet with the point of his stick for a moment before he brings it resolutely down upon the floor with a thump, and resumes, fiercely again: "Sir, your friend is the victim of an extraordinary resemblance, which is so much more painful to us than we could have made it to him that I have to struggle with my reason to believe that the apology should not come from his side rather than mine. He may feel that we have outraged him, but every look of his, every movement, every tone of his voice, is a mortal wound, a deadly insult to us. He should not live, sir, in the same solar system!" The General deals the floor another stab with his cane, while his eyes burn vindictively upon the mild brown orbs of Cummings, wide open with astonishment. He falters, with returning consciousness of his attitude: "I – I beg your pardon, sir; I am ridiculous." He closes his lips pathetically, and lets fall his head. When he lifts it again, it is to address Cummings with a singular gentleness: "I know that I speak to a gentleman."

*Cummings*.— "I try to be a good man."

*General Wyatt*.— "I had formed that idea of you, sir, in the pulpit. Will you do me the great kindness to answer a question, personal to myself, which I must ask?"

*Cummings*.— "By all means."

*General Wyatt.*— "You spoke of supposing me still in Paris. Are you aware of any circumstances – painful circumstances – connected with my presence there? Pardon my asking; I wouldn't press you if I could help."

*Cummings*, with reluctance. – "I had just heard something about – a letter from a friend" —

*General Wyatt*, bitterly. – "The news has travelled fast. Well, sir, a curious chance – a pitiless caprice of destiny – connects your friend with that miserable story." At Cummings's look of amaze: "Through no fault of his, sir; through no fault of his. Sir, I shall not seem to obtrude my trouble unjustifiably upon you when I tell you how; you will see that it was necessary for me to speak. I am glad you already know something of the affair, and I am sure that you will regard what I have to say with the right feeling of a gentleman, – of, as you say, a good man."

*Cummings.*— "Whatever you think necessary to say to me shall be sacred. But I hope you won't feel that it is necessary to say anything more. I am confident that when my friend has your assurance from me that what has happened is the result of a distressing association" —

*General Wyatt.*— "I thank you, sir. But something more is due to him; how much more you shall judge. Something more is due to us: I wish to preserve the appearance of sanity, in his eyes and your own. Nevertheless" – the General's tone and bearing perceptibly stiffen – "if you are reluctant" —

*Cummings*, with reverent cordiality. – "General Wyatt, I shall feel deeply honoured by whatever confidence you repose in me. I need not say how dear your fame is to us all." General Wyatt, visibly moved, bows to the young minister. "It was only on your account that I hesitated."

*General Wyatt.*— "Thanks. I understand. I will be explicit, but I will try to be brief. Your friend bears this striking, this painful resemblance to the man who has brought this blight upon us all; yes, sir," – at Cummings's look of deprecation, – "to a scoundrel whom I hardly know how to characterise aright – in the presence of a clergyman. Two years ago – doubtless your correspondent has written – my wife and daughter (they were then abroad without me) met him in Paris; and he won the poor child's affection. My wife's judgment was also swayed in his favour, – against her first impulse of distrust; but when I saw him, I could not endure him. Yet I was helpless: my girl's happiness was bound up in him; all that I could do was to insist upon delay. He was an American, well related, unobjectionable by all the tests which society can apply, and I might have had to wait long for the proofs that an accident gave me against him. The man's whole soul was rotten; at the time he had wound himself into my poor girl's innocent heart, a woman was living who had the just and perhaps the legal claim of a wife upon him; he was a felon besides, – a felon shielded through pity for his friends by the man whose name he had forged; he was of course a liar and a coward: I beat him with my stick, sir. Ah! I made him confess his infamy under his own hand, and then" – the General advances defiantly upon Cummings, who unconsciously retires a pace – "and then I compelled him to break with my daughter. Do you think I did right?"

*Cummings.*— "I don't exactly understand."

*General Wyatt.*— "Why, sir, it happens often enough in this shabby world that a man gains a poor girl's love, and then jilts her. I chose what I thought the less terrible sorrow for my child. I could not tell her how filthily unworthy he was without bringing to her pure heart a sense of intolerable contamination; I could not endure to speak of it even to my wife. It seemed better that they should both suffer such wrong as a broken engagement might bring them than that they should know what I knew. He was master of the part, and played it well; he showed himself to them simply a heartless scoundrel, and he remains in my power, an outcast now and a convict whenever I will. My story, as it seems to be, is well known in Paris; but the worst is unknown. I choose still that it shall be thought my girl was the victim of a dastardly slight, and I bear with her and her mother the insolent pity with which the world visits such sorrow." He pauses, and then brokenly resumes: "The affair has not turned out as I hoped, in the little I could hope from it. My trust that the blow, which must sink so deeply into her heart, would touch her pride, and that this would help her to react against it, was mistaken. In such things it appears a woman has no pride; I did not know it; we men are different. The blow crushed

her; that was all. Sometimes I am afraid that I must yet try the effect of the whole truth upon her; that I must try if the knowledge of all his baseness cannot restore to her the self-respect which the wrong done herself seems to have robbed her of. And yet I tremble lest the sense of his fouler shame – I may be fatally temporising; but in her present state, I dread any new shock for her; it may be death – I" – He pauses again, and sets his lips firmly; all at once he breaks into a sob. "I – I beg your pardon, sir."

*Cummings.* – "Don't! You wrong yourself and me. I have seen Miss Wyatt; but I hope" —

*General Wyatt.* – "You have seen her ghost. You have not seen the radiant creature that was once alive. Well, sir; enough of this. There is little left to trouble you with. We landed eight days ago, and I have since been looking about for some place in which my daughter could hide herself; I can't otherwise suggest her morbid sensitiveness, her terror of people. This region was highly commended to me for its healthfulness; but I have come upon this house by chance. I understood that it was empty, and I thought it more than probable that we might pass the autumn months here unmolested by the presence of any one belonging to our world, if not in entire seclusion. At the best, my daughter would hardly have been able to endure another change at once; so far as anything could give her pleasure, the beauty and the wild quiet of the region had pleased her, but she is now quite prostrated, sir," —

*Cummings,* definitively. – "My friend will go away at once. There is nothing else for it."

*General Wyatt.* – "That is too much to ask."

*Cummings.* – "I won't conceal my belief that he will think so. But there can be no question with him when" —

*General Wyatt.* – "When you tell him our story?" After a moment: "Yes, he has a right to know it – as the rest of the world knows it. You must tell him, sir."

*Cummings,* gently. – "No, he need know nothing beyond the fact of this resemblance to some one painfully associated with your past lives. He is a man whose real tenderness of heart would revolt from knowledge that could inflict further sorrow upon you."

*General Wyatt.* – "Sir, will you convey to this friend of yours an old man's very humble apology, and sincere prayer for his forgiveness?"

*Cummings.* – "He will not exact anything of that sort. The evidence of misunderstanding will be clear to him at a word from me."

*General Wyatt.* – "But he has a right to this explanation from my own lips, and – Sir, I am culpably weak. But now that I have missed seeing him here, I confess that I would willingly avoid meeting him. The mere sound of his voice, as I heard it before I saw him, in first coming upon you, was enough to madden me. Can you excuse my senseless dereliction to him?"

*Cummings.* – "I will answer for him."

*General Wyatt.* – "Thanks. It seems monstrous that I should be asking and accepting these great favours. But you are doing a deed of charity to a helpless man utterly beggared in pride." He chokes with emotion, and does not speak for a moment. "Your friend is also – he is not also – a clergyman?"

*Cummings,* smiling. – "No. He is a painter."

*General Wyatt.* – "Is he a man of note? Successful in his profession?"

*Cummings.* – "Not yet. But that is certain to come."

*General Wyatt.* – "He is poor?"

*Cummings.* – "He is a young painter."

*General Wyatt.* – "Sir, excuse me. Had he planned to remain here some time yet?"

*Cummings,* reluctantly. – "He has been sketching here. He had expected to stay through October."

*General Wyatt.* – "You make the sacrifice hard to accept – I beg your pardon! But I must accept it. I am bound hand and foot."

*Cummings.* – "I am sorry to have been obliged to tell you this."

*General Wyatt.* – "I obliged you, sir; I obliged you. Give me your advice, sir; you know your friend. What shall I do? I am not rich. I don't belong to a branch of the government service in which

people enrich themselves. But I have my pay; and if your friend could sell me the pictures he's been painting here" —

*Cummings.*— "That's quite impossible. There is no form in which I could propose such a thing to a man of his generous pride."

*General Wyatt.*— "Well, then, sir, I must satisfy myself as I can to remain his debtor. Will you kindly undertake to tell him?"

*An Elderly Serving-Woman*, who appears timidly and anxiously at the right-hand door. — "General Wyatt."

*General Wyatt*, with a start. — "Yes, Mary! Well?"

*Mary*, in vanishing. — "Mrs. Wyatt wishes to speak with you."

*General Wyatt*, going up to *Cummings*. — "I must go, sir. I leave unsaid what I cannot even try to say." He offers his hand.

*Cummings*, grasping the proffered hand. — "Everything is understood." But as Mr. *Cummings* returns from following *General Wyatt* to the door, his face does not confirm the entire security of his words. He looks anxious and perturbed, and when he has taken up his hat and stick, he stands pondering absent-mindedly. At last he puts on his hat and starts briskly toward the door. Before he reaches it, he encounters *Bartlett*, who advances abruptly into the room. "Oh! I was going to look for you."

## VI

### **Cummings and Bartlett**

*Bartlett*, sulkily. — "Were you?" He walks, without looking at *Cummings*, to where his painter's paraphernalia are lying, and begins to pick them up.

*Cummings.*— "Yes." In great embarrassment: "Bartlett, General Wyatt has been here."

*Bartlett*, without looking round. — "Who is General Wyatt?"

*Cummings.*— "I mean the gentleman who — whom you wouldn't wait to see."

*Bartlett.*— "Um!" He has gathered the things into his arms, and is about to leave the room.

*Cummings*, in great distress. — "Bartlett, Bartlett! Don't go! I implore you, if you have any regard for me whatever, to hear what I have to say. It's boyish, it's cruel, it's cowardly to behave as you're doing!"

*Bartlett.*— "Anything more, Mr. *Cummings*? I give you benefit of clergy."

*Cummings.*— "I take it — to denounce your proceeding as something that you'll always be sorry for and ashamed of."

*Bartlett.*— "Oh! Then, if you have quite freed your mind, I think I may go."

*Cummings.*— "No, no! You mustn't go. Don't go, my dear fellow. Forgive me! I know how insulted you feel, but upon my soul it's all a mistake, — it is, indeed. General Wyatt" — *Bartlett* falters a moment and stands as if irresolute whether to stay and listen or push on out of the room — "the young lady — I don't know how to begin!"

*Bartlett*, relenting a little. — "Well? I'm sorry for *you*, *Cummings*. I left a very awkward business to you, and it wasn't yours either. As for General Wyatt, as he chooses to call himself" —

*Cummings*, in amaze. — "Call himself? It's his *name*!"

*Bartlett.*— "Oh, very likely! So is King David his name, when he happens to be in a Scriptural craze. What explanation have you been commissioned to make me? What apology?"

*Cummings.*— "The most definite, the most satisfactory. You resemble in a most extraordinary manner a man who has inflicted an abominable wrong upon these people, a treacherous and cowardly villain" —

*Bartlett*, in a burst of fury. – "Stop! Is that your idea of an apology, an explanation? Isn't it enough that I should be threatened, and vilified, and have people fainting at the sight of me, but I must be told by way of reparation that it all happens because I look like a rascal?"

*Cummings*.– "My dear friend! Do listen to me!"

*Bartlett*.– "No, sir, I won't listen to you! I've listened too much! What right, I should like to know, have they to find this resemblance in me? And do they suppose that I'm going to be placated by being told that they treat me like a rogue because I look like one? It is a little too much. A man calls 'Stop thief' after me and expects me to be delighted when he tells me I look like a thief! The reparation is an additional insult. I don't choose to know that they fancy this infamous resemblance in me. Their pretending it is an outrage; and your reporting it to me is an offence. Will you tell them what I say? Will you tell this General Wyatt and the rest of his Bedlam-broke-loose, that they may all go to the" —

*Cummings*.– "For shame, for shame! You outrage a terrible sorrow! You insult a trouble sore to death! You trample upon, an anguish that should be sacred to your tears!"

*Bartlett*, resting his elbow on the corner of the piano. – "What – what do you mean, Cummings?"

*Cummings*.– "What do I mean? What you are not worthy to know! I mean that these people, against whom you vent your stupid rage, are worthy of angelic pity. I mean that by some disastrous mischance you resemble to the life, in tone, manner, and feature, the wretch who won that poor girl's heart, and then crushed it; who – Bartlett, look here! These are the people – this is the young lady – of whom my friend wrote me from Paris: do you understand?"

*Bartlett*, in a dull bewilderment. – "No, I don't understand."

*Cummings*.– "Why, you know what we were talking of just before they came in: you know what I told you of that cruel business."

*Bartlett*.– "Well?"

*Cummings*.– "Well, this is the young lady" —

*Bartlett*, dauntedly. – "Oh, come now! You don't expect me to believe that! It isn't a stage-play."

*Cummings*.– "Indeed, indeed, I tell you the miserable truth."

*Bartlett*.– "Do you mean to say that *this* is the young girl who was jilted in that way? Who – Do you mean – Do you intend to tell me – Do you suppose – Cummings" —

*Cummings*.– "Yes, yes, yes!"

*Bartlett*.– "Why, man, she's in Paris, according to your own showing!"

*Cummings*.– "She was in Paris three weeks ago. They have just brought her home, to help her hide her suffering, as if it were her shame, from all who know it. They are in this house by chance, but they are here. I mean what I say. You *must* believe it, shocking and wild as it is."

*Bartlett*, after a prolonged silence in which he seems trying to realise the fact. – "If you were a man capable of such a ghastly joke – but that's impossible." He is silent again, as before. "And I – What did you say about me? That I look like a man who" – He stops and stares into Cummings's face without speaking, as if he were trying to puzzle the mystery out; then, with fallen head, he muses in a voice of devout and reverent tenderness: "That – that – broken – lily! Oh!" With a sudden start he flings his burden upon the closed piano, whose hidden strings hum with the blow, and advances upon Cummings: "And you can *tell* it? Shame on *you*! It ought to be known to no one upon earth! And you – you show that gentle creature's death-wound to teach something like human reason to a surly dog like me? Oh, it's monstrous! I *wasn't* worth it. Better have let me go, where I would, how I would. What did it matter what I thought or said? And I – I look like that devil, do I? I have his voice, his face, his movement? Cummings, you've over-avenged yourself."

*Cummings*.– "Don't take it that way, Bartlett. It *is* hideous. But I didn't make it so, nor you. It's a fatality, it's a hateful chance. But you see now, don't you, Bartlett, how the sight of you must affect them, and how anxious her father must be to avoid you? He most humbly asked your forgiveness, and he hardly knew how to ask that you would not let her see you again. But I told him there could be

no question with you; that of course you would prevent it, and at once. I know it's a great sacrifice to expect you to go" —

*Bartlett.*— "Go? What are you talking about?" He breaks again from the daze into which he had relapsed. "If there's a hole on the face of the earth where I can hide myself from them, I want to find it. What do you think I'm made of? Go? I ought to be shot away out of a mortar; I ought to be struck away by lightning! Oh, I can't excuse you, Cummings! The indelicacy, the brutality of telling me that! No, no, — I can't overlook it." He shakes his head and walks away from his friend; then he returns, and bends on him a look of curious inquiry. "Am I really such a ruffian" — he speaks very gently, almost meekly, now — "that you didn't believe anything short of that would bring me to my senses? Who told you this of her?"

*Cummings.*— "Her father."

*Bartlett.*— "Oh, that's too loathsome! Had the man no soul, no mercy? Did he think me such a consummate beast that nothing less would drive me away? Yes, he did! Yes, I made him think so! Oh!" He hangs his head and walks away with a shudder.

*Cummings.*— "I don't know that he did you that injustice; but I'm afraid *I* did. I was at my wits' end."

*Bartlett,* very humbly. — "Oh, I don't know that you were wrong."

*Cummings.*— "I suppose that his anxiety for her life made it comparatively easy for him to speak of the hurt to her pride. She can't be long for this world."

*Bartlett.*— "No, she had the dying look!" After a long pause, in which he has continued to wander aimlessly about the room: "Cummings, is it necessary that you should tell him you told me?"

*Cummings.*— "You know I hate concealments of any kind, Bartlett."

*Bartlett.*— "Oh, well; do it then!"

*Cummings.*— "But I don't know that we shall see him again; and even if we do, I don't see how I can tell him unless he asks. It's rather painful."

*Bartlett.*— "Well, take that little sin on your conscience if you can. It seems to me too ghastly that I should know what you've told me; it's indecent. Cummings," — after another pause, — "how does a man go about such a thing? How does he contrive to tell the woman whose heart he has won that he doesn't care for her, and break the faith that she would have staked her life on? Oh, I know, — women do such things, too; but it's different, by a whole world's difference. A man comes and a man goes, but a woman *stays*. The world is before him after that happens, and we don't think him much of a man if he can't get over it. But she, she has been sought out; she has been made to believe that her smile and her looks are heaven, poor, foolish, helpless idol! her fears have been laid, all her pretty maidenly traditions, her proud reserves overcome; she takes him into her inmost soul, — to find that his love is a lie, a lie! Imagine it! She can't do anything. She can't speak. She can't move as long as she lives. She must stay where she has been left, and look and act as if nothing had happened. Oh, good Heaven! And I, *I* look like a man who could do that!" After a silence: "I feel as if there were blood on me!" He goes to the piano, and gathering up his things turns about towards Cummings again: "Come, man; I'm going. It's sacrilege to stay an instant, — to exist."

*Cummings.*— "Don't take it in that way, Bartlett. I blame myself very much for not having spared you in what I said. I wouldn't have told you of it, if I could have supposed that an accidental resemblance of the sort would distress you so."

*Bartlett,* contritely. — "You had to tell me. I forced you to extreme measures. I'm quite worthy to look like him. Good Lord! I suppose I should be capable of his work." He moves towards the door with his burden, but before he reaches it General Wyatt, from the corridor, meets him with an air of confused agitation. Bartlett halts awkwardly, and some of the things slip from his hold to the floor.

## VII

### General Wyatt, Cummings, and Bartlett

*General Wyatt.*— "Sir, I am glad to see you." He pronounces the civility with a manner evidently affected by the effort to reconcile Bartlett's offensive personal appearance with his own sense of duty. "I – I was sorry to miss you before; and now I wish – Your friend" – referring with an inquiring glance to Cummings – "has explained to you the cause of our very extraordinary behaviour, and I hope you" —

*Bartlett.*— "Mr. Cummings has told me that I have the misfortune to resemble some one with whom you have painful associations. That is quite enough, and entirely justifies you. I am going at once, and I trust you will forgive my rudeness in absentsing myself a moment ago. I have a bad temper; but I never could forgive myself if I had forced my friend" – he turns and glares warningly at Cummings, who makes a faint pantomime of conscientious protest as Bartlett proceeds – "to hear anything more than the mere fact from you. No, no," – as General Wyatt seems about to speak, – "it would be atrocious in me to seek to go behind it. I wish to know nothing more." Cummings gives signs of extreme unrest at being made a party to this tacit deception, and General Wyatt, striking his palms hopelessly together, walks to the other end of the room. Bartlett touches the fallen camp-stool with his foot. "Cummings, will you be kind enough to put that on top of this other rubbish?" He indicates his armful, and as Cummings complies, he says in a swift fierce whisper: "Her secret is mine. If you dare to hint that you've told it to me, I'll – I'll assault you in your own pulpit." Then to General Wyatt, who is returning toward him: "Good-morning, sir."

*General Wyatt.*— "Oh! Ah! Stop! That is, don't go! Really, sir, I don't know what to say. I must have seemed to you like a madman a moment ago, and now I've come to play the fool." Bartlett and Cummings look their surprise, and General Wyatt hurries on: "I asked your friend to beg you to go away, and now I am here to beg you to remain. It's perfectly ridiculous, sir, I know, and I can say nothing in defence of the monstrous liberties I have taken. Sir, the matter is simply this: my daughter's health is so frail that her life seems to hang by a thread, and I am powerless to do anything against her wish. It may be a culpable weakness, but I cannot help it. When I went back to her from seeing your friend, she immediately divined what my mission had been, and it had the contrary effect from what I had expected. Well, sir! Nothing would content her but that I should return and ask you to stay. She looks upon it as the sole reparation we can make you."

*Bartlett,* gently. – "I understand that perfectly; and may I beg you to say that in going away I thanked her with all my heart, and ventured to leave her my best wishes?" He bows as if to go.

*General Wyatt,* detaining him. – "Excuse me – thanks – but – but I am afraid she will not be satisfied with that. She will be satisfied with nothing less than your remaining. It is the whim of a sick child – which I must ask you to indulge. In a few days, sir, I hope we may be able to continue on our way. It would be simply unbearable pain to her to know that we had driven you away, and you must stay to show that you have forgiven the wrong we have done you."

*Bartlett.*— "That's nothing, less than nothing. But I was thinking – I don't care for myself in the matter – that Miss Wyatt is proposing a very unnecessary annoyance for you all. My friend can remain and assure her that I have no feeling whatever about the matter, and in the meantime I can remove – the embarrassment – of my presence."

*General Wyatt.*— "Sir, you are very considerate, very kind. My own judgment is in favour of your course, and yet" —

*Cummings.*— "I think my friend is right, and that when he is gone" —

*General Wyatt.*— "Well, sir! well, sir! It may be the best way. I think it *is* the best. We will venture upon it. Sir," — to Bartlett, — "may I have the honour of taking your hand?" Bartlett lays down his burden on the piano, and gives his hand. "Thank you, thank you! You will not regret this goodness. God bless you! May you always prosper!"

*Bartlett.*— "Good-bye; and say to Miss Wyatt" — At these words he pauses, arrested by an incomprehensible dismay in General Wyatt's face, and turning about he sees Cummings transfixed at the apparition of Miss Wyatt advancing directly toward himself, while her mother coming behind her exchanges signals of helplessness and despair with the General. The young girl's hair, thick and bronze, has been heaped in hasty but beautiful masses on her delicate head; as she stands with fallen eyes before Bartlett, the heavy lashes lie dark on her pale cheeks, and the blue of her eyes shows through their transparent lids. She has a fan with which she makes a weak pretence of playing, and which she puts to her lips as if to hide the low murmur that escapes from them as she raises her eyes to Bartlett's face.

## VIII

### **Constance, Mrs. Wyatt, and the others**

*Constance*, with a phantom-like effort at hauteur. — "I hope you have been able to forgive the annoyance we caused you, and that you won't let it drive you away." She lifts her eyes with a slow effort, and starts with a little gasp as they fall upon his face, and then remains trembling before him while he speaks.

*Bartlett*, reverently. — "I am to do whatever you wish. I have no annoyance — but the fear that — that" —

*Constance*, in a husky whisper. — "Thanks!" As she turns from him to go back to her mother, she moves so frailly that he involuntarily puts out his hand.

*Mrs. Wyatt*, starting forward. — "No!" But Constance clutches his extended arm with one of her pale hands, and staying herself for a moment lifts her eyes again to his, looks steadily at him with her face half turned upon him, and then, making a slight, sidelong inclination of the head, releases his arm and goes to her mother, who supports her to one of the easy-chairs and kneels beside her when she sinks into it. Bartlett, after an instant of hesitation, bows silently and withdraws, Cummings having already vanished. Constance watches him going, and then hides her face on her mother's neck.

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