

"The doctor gave it to you, my child, and it's going to make you better soon."

Sharlee followed Fifi out with troubled eyes. However, Mrs. Paynter at once drew her back to the matter in hand.

"Sharlee, do you know what would be the very way to settle this little difficulty? To write him a formal, business-like letter. We'll —"

"No, I've thought of that, Aunt Jennie, and I don't believe it's the way. A letter could n't get to the bottom of the matter. You see, we want to find out something about this man, and why he isn't paying, and whether there is reason to think he can and will pay. Besides, I think he needs a talking to on general principles."

"Well — but how are you going to do it, my dear?"

"Play a Fabian game. Wait! — be stealthy and wait! If he does n't come out of hiding to-night, I'll return for him to-morrow. I'll keep on coming, night after night, night after night, n— Some one's knocking —"

"Come in," said Mrs. Paynter, looking up.

The door leading into the hall opened, and the man himself stood upon the threshold, looking at them absently.

"May I have some supper, Mrs. Paynter? I was closely engaged and failed to notice the time."

Sharlee arose. "Certainly. I'll get you some at once," she answered innocently enough. But to herself she was saying: "The Lord has delivered him into my hand."

III

Encounter between Charlotte Lee Weyland, a Landlady's Agent, and Doctor Queed, a Young Man who would n't pay his Board.

SHARLEE glanced at Mrs. Paynter, who caught herself and said: "Mr. Queed, my niece — Miss Weyland."

But over the odious phrase, "my business woman," her lips boggled and balked; not to save her life could she bring herself to damn her own niece with such an introduction.

Noticing the omission and looking through the reasons for it as through window-glass, Sharlee smothered a laugh, and bowed. Mr. Queed bowed, but did not laugh or even smile. He drew up a chair at his usual place and sat down. As by an involuntary reflex, his left hand dropped toward his coat-pocket, whence the top edges of a book could be descried protruding. Mrs. Paynter moved vaguely toward the door. As for her business woman, she made at once for the kitchen, where Emma and her faithful co-worker and mother, Laura, rose from their supper to assist her. With her own hands the girl cut a piece of the Porterhouse for Mr. Queed. Creamed potatoes, two large spoonfuls, were added; two rolls; some batterbread; coffee, which had to be diluted with a little hot water to make out the full cup; butter; damson preserves in a saucer: all of which duly set forth and arranged on a shiny black "waiter."

"Enough for a whole platform of doctors," said Sharlee, critically reviewing the spread. "Thank you, Emma."

She took the tray in both hands and pushed open the swing-doors with her side, thus making her ingress to the dining-room in a sort of crab-fashion. Mrs. Paynter was

gone. Mr. Queed sat alone in the dining-room. His book lay open on the table and he was humped over it, hand in his hair.

Having set her tray on the side-table, Sharlee came to his side with the plate of steak and potatoes. He did not stir, and presently she murmured, "I beg your pardon."

He looked up half-startled, not seeming to take in for the first second who or what she was.

"Oh . . . yes."

He moved his book, keeping his finger in the place, and she set down the plate. Next she brought the appurtenances one by one, the butter, coffee, and so on. The old mahogany sideboard yielded knife, fork, and spoon; salt and pepper; from the right-hand drawer, a fresh napkin. These placed, she studied them, racked her brains a moment and, from across the table —

"Is there anything else?"

Mr. Queed's eye swept over his equipment with intelligent quickness. "A glass of water, please."

"Oh! — Certainly."

Sharlee poured a glass from the battered silver pitcher on the side-table — the one that the Yankees threw out of the window in May, 1862 — and duly placed it. Mr. Queed was oblivious to the little courtesy. By this time he had propped his book open against the plate of rolls and was reading it between cuts on the steak. Beside the plate he had laid his watch, an open-faced nickel one about the size of a desk-clock.

"Do you think that is everything?"

"I believe that is all."

"Do you remember me?" then asked Sharlee.

He glanced at her briefly through his spectacles, his eyes soon returning to his supper.

"I think not."

The girl smiled suddenly, all by herself. "It was my dog that — upset you on Main Street this afternoon. You may remember . . .? I thought you seemed to — to limp

a little when you came in just now. I'm awfully sorry for the — mishap —"

"It is of no consequence," he said, with some signs of unrest. "I walk seldom. Your — pleasure-dog was uninjured, I trust?"

"Thank you. He was never better."

That the appearance of the pleasure-dog's owner as a familiar of his boarding-house piqued his curiosity not the slightest was only too evident. He bowed, his eyes returning from steak to book.

"I am obliged to you for getting my supper."

If he had said, "Will you kindly go?" his meaning could hardly have been more unmistakable. However, Mrs. Paynter's resolute agent held her ground. Taking advantage of his gross absorption, she now looked the delinquent boarder over with some care. At first glance Mr. Queed looked as if he might have been born in a library, where he had unaspiringly settled down. To support this impression there were his pallid complexion and enormous round spectacles; his dusty air of premature age; his general effect of dried-up detachment from his environment. One noted, too, the tousled mass of nondescript hair, which he wore about a month too long; the necktie-band triumphing over the collar in the back; the collar itself, which had a kind of celluloid look and shone with a blue unwholesome sheen under the gas-light. On the other hand there was the undeniably trim cut of the face, which gave an unexpected and contradictory air of briskness. The nose was bold; the long straight mouth might have belonged to a man of action. Probably the great spectacles were the turning-point in the man's whole effect. You felt that if you could get your hands on him long enough to pull those off, and cut his hair, you might have an individual who would not so surely have been christened the little Doctor.

These details the agent gathered at her leisure. Meantime here was the situation, stark and plain; and she, and she alone, must handle it. She must tell this young man,

so frankly engrossed in his mental and material food, which he ate by his watch, that he must fork over four times seven-fifty or vacate the premises. . . . Yes, but how to do it? He could not be much older than she herself, but his manner was the most impervious, the most impossible that she had ever seen. "I'm grim and I'm resolute," she said over to herself; but the splendid defiance of the motto failed to quicken her blood. Not even the recollection of the month's sponge for board and the house-rent due next week spurred her to action. Then she thought of Fifi, whom Mr. Queed had packed off sobbing for his good pleasure, and her resolution hardened.

"I'm afraid I must interrupt your reading for a moment," she said quietly. "There is something I want to say. . . ."

He glanced up for the second time. There was surprise and some vexation in the eyes behind his circular glasses, but no sign of any interest.

"Well?"

"When my aunt introduced you to me just now she did not — did not identify me as she should —"

"Really, does it make any difference?"

"Yes, I think it does. You see, I am not only her niece, but her business woman, her agent, as well. She is n't very good at business, but still she has a good deal of it to be done. She runs this boarding-place, and people of various kinds come to her and she takes them into her house. Many of these people are entirely unknown to her. In this way trouble sometimes arises. For instance people come now and then who — how shall I put it? — are very reserved about making their board-payments. My aunt hardly knows how to deal with them —"

He interrupted her with a gesture and a glance at his watch. "It always seems to me an unnecessary waste of time not to be direct. You have called to collect my arrearage for board?"

"Well, yes. I have."

"Please tell your aunt that when I told her to give herself

no concern about that matter, I exactly meant what I said. To-night I received funds through the mail; the sum, twenty dollars. Your aunt," said he, obviously ready to return to his reading matter, "shall have it all."

But Sharlee had heard delinquent young men talk like that before, and her business platform in these cases was to be introduced to their funds direct.

"That would cut down the account nicely," said she, looking at him pleasantly, but a shade too hard to imply a beautiful trust. She went on much like the firm young lady enumerators who take the census: "By the way — let me ask: Have you any regular business or occupation?"

"Not, I suppose, in the sense in which you mean the interrogation."

"Perhaps you have friends in the city, who —"

"Friends! Here! Good Lord — *no!*" said he, with exasperated vehemence.

"I gather," was surprised from her, "that you do not wish —"

"They are the last thing in the world that I desire. My experience in that direction in New York quite sufficed me, I assure you. I came here," said he, with rather too blunt an implication, "to be let alone."

"I was thinking of references, you know. You have friends in New York, then?"

"Yes, I have two. But I doubt if you would regard them as serviceable for references. The best of them is only a policeman; the other is a yeggman by trade — his brother, by the way."

She was silent a moment, wondering if he were telling the truth, and deciding what to say next. The young man used the silence to bolt his coffee at a gulp and go hurriedly but deeply into the preserves.

"My aunt will be glad that you can make a remittance to-night. I will take it to her for you with pleasure."

"Oh! — All right."

He put his hand into his outer breast-pocket, pulled out

an envelope, and absently pitched it across the table. She looked at it and saw that it was postmarked the city and bore a typewritten address.

"Am I to open this?"

"Oh, as you like," said he, and, removing the spoon, turned a page.

The agent picked up the envelope with anticipations of helpful clues. It was her business to find out everything that she could about Mr. Queed. A determinedly moneyless, friendless, and vocationless young man could not daily stretch his limbs under her aunt's table and retain the Third Hall Back against more compensatory guests. But the letter proved a grievous disappointment to her. Inside was a folded sheet of cheap white paper, apparently torn from a pad. Inside the sheet was a new twenty-dollar bill. That was all. Apart from the address, there was no writing anywhere.

Yet the crisp greenback, incognito though it came, indubitably suggested that Mr. Queed was not an entire stranger to the science of money-making.

"Ah," said the agent, insinuatingly, "evidently you have some occupation, after all — of — of a productive sort. . . ."

He looked up again with that same air of vexed surprise, as much as to say: "What! You still hanging around!"

"I don't follow you, I fear."

"I assume that this money comes to you in payment for some — work you have done —"

"It is an assumption, certainly."

"You can appreciate, perhaps, that I am not idly inquisitive. I should n't —"

"What is it that you wish to know?"

"As to this money —"

"Really, you know as much about it as I do. It came exactly as I handed it to you: the envelope, the blank paper, and the bill."

"But you know, of course, where it comes from?"

"I can't say I do. Evidently," said Mr. Queed, "it is intended as a gift."

"Then — perhaps you have a good friend here after all? Some one who has guessed —"

"I think I told you that I have but two friends, and I know for a certainty that they are both in New York. Besides, neither of them would give me twenty dollars."

"But — but — but," said the girl, laughing through her utter bewilderment — "are n't you interested to know who *did* give it to you? Are n't you *curious*? I assure you that in this city it's not a bit usual to get money through the mails from anonymous admirers —"

"Nor did I say that this was a usual case. I told you that I did n't *know* who sent me this."

"Exactly —"

"But I have an idea. I think my father sent it."

"Oh! Your father. . . ."

So he had a father, an eccentric but well-to-do father, who, though not a friend, yet sent in twenty dollars now and then to relieve his son's necessities. Sharlee felt her heart rising.

"Don't think me merely prying. You see I am naturally interested in the question of whether you — will find yourself able to stay on here —"

"You refer to my ability to make my board payments?"

"Yes."

Throughout this dialogue, Mr. Queed had been eating, steadily and effectively. Now he slid his knife and fork into place with a pained glance at his watch; and simultaneously a change came over his face, a kind of tightening, shot through with Christian fortitude, which plainly advertised an unwelcome resolution.

"My supper allowance of time," he began warningly, "is practically up. However, I suppose the definite settlement of this board question cannot be postponed further. I must not leave you under any misapprehensions. If this money came from my father, it is the first I ever had from him in my life. Whether I am to get any more from him

is problematical, to say the least. Due consideration must be given the fact that he and I have never met."

"Oh! . . . Does — he live here, in the city?"

"I have some reason to believe that he does. It is indeed," Mr. Queed set forth to his landlady's agent, "because of that belief that I have come here. I have assumed, with good grounds, that he would promptly make himself known to me, take charge of things, and pay my board; but though I have been here nearly a month, he has so far made not the slightest move in that direction, unless we count this letter. Possibly he leaves it to me to find him, but I, on my part, have no time to spare for any such undertaking. I make the situation clear to you? Under the circumstances I cannot promise you a steady revenue from my father. On the other hand, for all that I know, it may be his plan to send me money regularly after this."

There was a brief pause. "But — apart from the money consideration — have you no interest in finding him?"

"Oh — if that is all one asks! But it happens not to be a mere question of my personal whim. Possibly you can appreciate the fact that finding a father is a tremendous task when you have no idea where he lives, or what he looks like, or what name he may be using. My time is wholly absorbed by my own work. I have none to give to a wild-goose chase such as that, on the mere chance that, if found, he would agree to pay my board for the future."

If he had been less in earnest he would have been grotesque. As it was, Sharlee was by no means sure that he escaped it; and she could not keep a controversial note out of her voice as she said: —

"Yours must be a very great work to make you view the finding of your father in that way."

"The greatest in the world," he answered, drily. "I may call it, loosely, evolutionary sociology."

She was so silent after this, and her expression was so peculiar, that he concluded that his words conveyed nothing to her.

"The science," he added kindly, "which treats of the origin, nature, and history of human society; analyzes the relations of men in organized communities; formulates the law or laws of social progress and permanence; and correctly applies these laws to the evolutionary development of human civilization."

"I am familiar with the terms. And your ambition is to become a great evolutionary sociologist?"

He smiled faintly. "To become one?"

"Oh! Then you are one already?"

For answer, Mr. Queed dipped his hand into his inner pocket, produced a large wallet, and from a mass of papers selected a second envelope.

"You mention references. Possibly these will impress you as even better than friends."

Sharlee, seated on the arm of Major Brooke's chair, ran through the clippings: two advertisements of a well-known "heavy" review announcing articles by Mr. Queed; a table of contents torn from a year-old number of the *Political Science Quarterly* to the same effect; an editorial from a New York newspaper commenting on one of these articles and speaking laudatorily of its author; a private letter from the editor of the "heavy" urging Mr. Queed to write another article on a specified subject, "Sociology and Socialism."

To Sharlee the exhibit seemed surprisingly formidable, but the wonder in her eyes was not at that. Her marvel was for the fact that the man who was capable of so cruelly elbowing little Fifi out of his way should be counted a follower of the tenderest and most human of sciences.

"They impress me," she said, returning his envelope; "but not as better than friends."

"Ah? A matter of taste. Now —"

"I had always supposed," continued the girl, looking at him, "that sociology had a close relation with life — in fact, that it was based on a conscious recognition of — the brotherhood of man."

"Your supposition is doubtless sound, though you express it so loosely—"

"Yet you feel that the sociologist has no such relation?"

He glanced up sharply. At the subtly hostile look in her eyes, his expression became, for the first time, a little interested.

"How do you deduce that?"

"Oh! . . . It is loose, if you like — but I deduce it from what you have said — and implied — about your father and — having friends."

But what she thought of, most of all, was the case of Fifi.

She stood across the table, facing him, looking down at him; and there was a faintly heightened color in her cheeks. Her eyes were the clearest lapis lazuli, heavily fringed with lashes which were blacker than Egypt's night. Her chin was finely and strongly cut; almost a masculine chin, but unmasculinely softened by the sweetness of her mouth.

Mr. Queed eyed her with some impatience through his round spectacles.

"You apparently jumble together the theory and what you take to be the application of a science in the attempt to make an impossible unit. Hence your curious confusion. Theory and application are as totally distinct as the poles. The few must discover for the many to use. My own task — since the matter appears to interest you — is to work out the laws of human society for those who come after to practice and apply."

"And suppose those who come after feel the same unwillingness to practice and apply that you, let us say, feel?"

"It becomes the business of government to persuade them."

"And if government shirks also? What is government but the common expression of masses of individuals very much like yourself?"

"There you return, you see, to your fundamental error. There are very few individuals in the least like me. I hap-

pen to be writing a book of great importance, not to myself merely, but to posterity. If I fail to finish my book, if I am delayed in finishing it, I can hardly doubt that the world will be the loser. This is not a task like organizing a prolonged search for one's father, or dawdling with friends, which a million men can do equally well. I alone can write my book. Perhaps you now grasp my duty of concentrating all my time and energy on this single work and ruthlessly eliminating whatever interferes with it."

The girl found his incredible egoism at once amusing and extremely exasperating.

"Have you ever thought," she asked, "that thousands of other self-absorbed men have considered their own particular work of supreme importance, and that most of them have been — mistaken?"

"Really I have nothing to do with other men's mistakes. I am responsible only for my own."

"And that is why it is a temptation to suggest that conceivably you had made one here."

"But you find difficulty in suggesting such a thought convincingly? That is because I have not conceivably made any such mistake. A Harvey must discover the theory of the circulation of the blood; it is the business of lesser men to apply the discovery to practical ends. It takes a Whitney to invent the cotton gin, but the dullest negro roustabout can operate it. Why multiply illustrations of a truism? Theory, you perceive, calls for other and higher gifts than application. The man who can formulate the eternal laws of social evolution can safely leave it to others to put his laws into practice."

Sharlee gazed at him in silence, and he returned her gaze, his face wearing a look of the rankest complacency that she had ever seen upon a human countenance. But all at once his eyes fell upon his watch, and his brow clouded.

"Meantime," he went on abruptly, "there remains the question of my board."

"Yes. . . . Do I understand that you — derive your

living from these social laws that you write up for others to practice?"

"Oh, no — impossible! There is no living to be made there. When my book comes out there may be a different story, but that is two years and ten months off. Every minute taken from it for the making of money is, as you may now understand, decidedly unfortunate. Still," he added depressedly, "I must arrange to earn something, I suppose, since my father's assistance is so problematical. I worked for money in New York, for awhile."

"Oh — did you?"

"Yes, I helped a lady write a thesaurus."

"Oh. . . ."

"It was a mere fad with her. I virtually wrote the work for her and charged her five dollars an hour." He looked at her narrowly. "Do you happen to know of any one here who wants work of that sort done?"

The agent did not answer. By a series of covert glances she had been trying to learn, upside down, what it was that Mr. Queed was reading. "Sociology," she had easily picked out, but the chapter heading, on the opposite page, was more troublesome, and, deeply absorbed, she had now just succeeded in deciphering it. The particular division of his subject in which Mr. Queed was so much engrossed was called "Man's Duty to His Neighbors."

Struck by the silence, Sharlee looked up with a small start, and the faintest possible blush. "I beg your pardon?"

"I asked if you knew of any lady here, a wealthy one, who would like to write a thesaurus as a fad."

The girl was obliged to admit that, at the moment, she could think of no such person. But her mind fastened at once on the vulgar, hopeful fact that the unsocial sociologist wanted a job.

"That's unfortunate," said Mr. Queed. "I suppose I must accept a little regular, very remunerative work — to settle this board question once and for all. An hour or two

a day, at most. However, it is not easy to lay one's hand on such work in a strange city."

"Perhaps," said Miss Weyland slowly, "I can help you."

"I'm sure I hope so," said he with another flying glance at his watch. "That is what I have been approaching for seven minutes."

"Don't you always find it an unnecessary waste of time not to be direct?"

He sat, slightly frowning, impatiently fingering the pages of his book. The hit bounded off him like a rubber ball thrown against the Great Wall of China.

"Well?" he demanded. "What have you to propose?"

The agent sat down in a chair across the table, William Klinker's chair, and rested her chin upon her shapely little hand. The other shapely little hand toyed with the crisp twenty dollar bill, employing it to trace geometric designs upon the colored table-cloth. Mr. Queed had occasion to consult his watch again before she raised her head.

"I propose," she said, "that you apply for some special editorial work on the *Post*."

"The *Post*? The *Post*? The morning newspaper here?"

"One of them."

He laughed, actually laughed. It was a curious, slow laugh, betraying that the muscles which accomplished it were flabby for want of exercise.

"And who writes the editorials on the *Post* now?"

"A gentleman named Colonel Cowles —"

"Ah! His articles on taxation read as if they might have been written by a military man. I happened to read one the day before yesterday. It was most amusing —"

"Excuse me. Colonel Cowles is a friend of mine —"

"What has that got to do with his political economy? If he is your friend, then I should say that you have a most amusing friend."

Sharlee rose, decidedly irritated. "Well — that is my suggestion. I believe you will find it worth thinking over. Good-night."

"The *Post* pays its contributors well, I suppose?"

"That you would have to take up with its owners."

"Clearly the paper needs the services of an expert — though, of course, I could not give it much time, only enough to pay for my keep. The suggestion is not a bad one — not at all. As to applying, as you call it, is this amiable Colonel Cowles the person to be seen?"

"Yes. No — wait a minute." She had halted in her progress to the door; her mind's eye conjured up a probable interview between the Colonel and the scientist, and she hardly had the heart to let it go at that. Moreover, she earnestly wished, for Mrs. Paynter's reasons, that the tenant of the third hall back should become associated with the pay-envelope system of the city. "Listen," she went on. "I know one of the directors of the *Post*, and shall be glad to speak to him in your behalf. Then, if there is an opening, I'll send you, through my aunt, a card of introduction to him and you can go to see him."

"Could n't he come to see me? I am enormously busy."

"So is he. I doubt if you could expect him to —"

"H'm. Very well. I am obliged to you for your suggestion. Of course I shall take no step in the matter until I hear from you."

"Good-evening," said the agent, icily.

He bowed slightly in answer to the salute, uttering no further word; for him the interview ended right there, cleanly and satisfactorily. From the door the girl glanced back. Mr. Queed had drawn his heavy book before him, pencil in hand, and was once more engrossed in the study and annotation of "Man's Duty to His Neighbors."

In the hall Sharlee met Fifi, who was tipping toward the dining-room to discover, by the frank method of ear and keyhole, how the grim and resolute collector was faring.

"You're still alive, Sharlee! Any luck?"

"The finest in the world, darling! Twenty dollars in the hand and a remunerative job for him in the bush."

Fifi did a few steps of a minuet. "Hooray!" said she in her weak little voice.

Sharlee put her arms around the child's neck and said in her ear: "Fifi, be very gentle with that young man. He's the most pitiful little creature I ever saw."

"Why," said Fifi, "I don't think he feels that way at all —"

"Don't you see that's just what makes him so infinitely pathetic? He's the saddest little man in the world, and it has never dawned on him."

It was not till some hours later, when she was making ready for bed in her own room, that it occurred to Sharlee that there was something odd in this advice to her little cousin. For she had started out with the intention to tell Mr. Queed that he must be very gentle with Fifi.