

## VI

*Autobiographical Data imparted, for Sound Business Reasons, to a Landlady's Agent; of the Agent's Other Title, etc.*

WHILE all move in slots in this world, Mr. Queed's slot was infinitely more clearly marked than any of his neighbors'. It ran exclusively between the heaven of his room and the hades of the *Post* office; manifesting itself at the latter place in certain staid writings done in exchange for ten dollars, currency of the realm, paid down each and every Saturday. Into this slot he had been lifted, as it were by the ears, by a slip of a girl of the name of Charlotte Lee Weyland, though it was some time before he ever thought of it in that way.

In the freemasonry of the boarding-house, the young man was early accepted as he was. He was promptly voted the driest, most uninteresting and self-absorbed savant ever seen. Even Miss Miller, ordinarily indefatigable where gentlemen were concerned, soon gave him up. To Mr. Bylash she spoke contemptuously of him, but secretly she was awed by his stately manner of speech and his godlike indifference to all pleasures, including those of female society. Of them all, Nicolovius was the only one who seemed in the least impressed by Mr. Queed's appointment as editorial writer on the *Post*. With the others the exalted world he moved in was so remote from theirs that no surprises were possible there, and if informed that the little Doctor had been elected president of Harvard University, it would have seemed all in the day's work to William Klinker. Klinker was six feet high, red-faced and friendly, and Queed preferred his conversation above any heard at Mrs. Paynter's table. It reminded him very much of his friend the yeggman in New York.

What went on behind the door of the tiny Scriptorium the boarders could only guess. It may be said that its owner's big grievance against the world was that he had to leave it occasionally to earn his bread and meat. Apart from this he never left it in those days except for one reason, viz., the consumption three times a day of the said bread and meat. Probably this was one explanation of the marked pallor of his cheek, but of such details as this he never took the smallest notice.

Under the tiny bed were three boxes of books, chief fruit of the savings of an inexpensive lifetime. But the books were now merely the occasional stimulus of a mind already well stored with their strength, well fortified against their weaknesses. Nowadays nearly all of Queed's time, which he administered by an iron-clad Schedule of Hours, duly drawn up, went to the actual writing of his Magnum Opus. He had practically decided that it should be called "The Science of Sciences." For his book was designed to coördinate and unify the theories of all science into the single theory which alone gave any of them a living value, namely, the progressive evolution of a higher organized society and a higher individual type. That this work would blaze a wholly new trail for a world of men, he rarely entertained a doubt. To its composition he gave fifteen actual hours a day on *Post* days, sixteen hours on non-*Post* days. Many men speak of working hours like these, or even longer ones, but investigation would generally show that all kinds of restful interludes are indiscriminately counted in. Queed's hours, you understand, were not elapsed time — they were absolutely net. He was one of the few men in the world who literally "did n't have time."

He sat in Colonel Cowles's office, scribbling rapidly, with his eye on his watch, writing one of those unanswerable articles which were so much dead space to a people's newspaper. It was a late afternoon in early February, soon after the opening of the legislature; and he was alone in the office. A knock fell upon the door, and at his "Come," a girl

entered who looked as pretty as a dewy May morning. Queed looked up at her with no welcome in his eye, or greeting on his lip, or spring in the pregnant hinges of his knee. Yet if he had been a less self-absorbed young scientist, it must certainly have dawned on him that he had seen this lady before.

"Oh! How do you do!" said Sharlee, for it was indeed no other.

"Oh — quite well."

"Miss Leech tells me that Colonel Cowles has gone out. I particularly wished to see him. Perhaps you know when he will be back?"

"Perhaps in half an hour. Perhaps in an hour. I cannot say."

She mused disappointedly. "I could hardly wait. Would you be good enough to give him a message for me?"

"Very well."

"Well — just tell him, please, that if he can make it convenient, we'd like the article about the reformatory to go in to-morrow, or the next day, anyway. He'll understand perfectly; I have talked it all over with him. The only point was as to when the article would have the most effect, and we think the time has come now."

"You would like an article written about a reformatory for to-morrow's *Post* or next day's. Very well."

"Thank you so much for telling him. Good-afternoon."

"*You* would like," the young man repeated — "but one moment, if you please. You have omitted to inform me who *you* are."

To his surprise the lady turned round with a gay laugh. Sharlee had supposed that Mr. Queed, having been offended by her, was deliberately cutting her. That her identity had literally dropped cleanly from his mind struck her as both much better and decidedly more amusing.

"Don't you remember me?" she reminded him once again, laughing full at him from the threshold. "My dog knocked you over in the street one day — surely you

remember the pleasure-dog? — and then that night I gave you your supper at Mrs. Paynter's and afterwards collected twenty dollars from you for back board. I am Mrs. Paynter's niece and my name is Charlotte Weyland."

Weyland? . . . Weyland? Oho! So this was the girl — sure enough — that Henry G. Surface had stripped of her fortune. Well, well!

"Ah, yes, I recall you now."

She thought there was an inimical note in his voice, and to pay him for it, she said with a final smiling nod: "Oh, I am *so* pleased!"

Her little sarcasm passed miles over his head. She had touched the spring of the automatic card-index system known as his memory and the ingenious machinery worked on. Presently it pushed out and laid before him the complete record, neatly ticketed and arranged, the full dossier, of all that had passed between him and the girl. But she was nearly through the door before he had decided to say:

"I had another letter from my father last night."

"Oh!" she said, turning at once — "*Did* you!"

He nodded, gloomily. "However, there was not a cent of money in it."

If he had racked his brains for a subject calculated to detain her — which we may rely upon it that he did not do — he could not have hit upon a surer one. Sharlee Weyland had a great fund of pity for this young man's worse than fatherlessness, and did not in the least mind showing it. She came straight back into the room and up to the table where he sat.

"Does it help you at all — about knowing where he is, I mean?"

"Not in the least. I wonder what he's up to anyway?"

He squinted up at her interrogatively through his circular glasses, as though she ought to be able to tell him if anybody could. Then a thought very much like that took definite shape in his mind. He himself had no time to give to mysterious problems and will-o'-the-wisp pursuits; his

book and posterity claimed it all. This girl was familiar with the city; doubtless knew all the people; she seemed intelligent and capable, as girls went. He remembered that he had consulted her about securing remunerative work, with some results; possibly she would also have something sensible to say about his paternal problem. He might make an even shrewder stroke. As his landlady's agent, this girl would of course be interested in establishing his connection with a relative who had twenty-dollar bills to give away. Therefore if it ever should come to a search, why might n't he turn the whole thing over to the agent — persuade her to hunt his father for him, and thus leave his own time free for the service of the race?

"Look here," said he, with a glance at his watch. "I'll take a few minutes. Kindly sit down there and I'll show you how the man is behaving."

Sharlee sat down as she was bidden, close by his side, piqued as to her curiosity, as well as flattered by his royal condescension. She wore her business suit, which was rough and blue, with a smart little pony coat. She also wore a white veil festooned around her hat, and white gloves that were quite unspotted from the world. The raw February winds had whipped roses into her cheeks; her pure ultramarine eyes made the blue of her suit look commonplace and dull. Dusk had fallen over the city, and Queed cleverly bethought him to snap on an electric light. It revealed a very shabby, ramshackle, and dingy office; but the long table in it was new, oaken, and handsome. In fact, it was one of the repairs introduced by the new management.

"Here," said he, "is his first letter — the one that brought me from New York."

He took it from its envelope and laid it open on the table. A sense of the pathos in this ready sharing of one's most intimate secrets with a stranger took hold of Sharlee as she leaned forward to see what it might say.

"Be careful! Your feather thing is sticking my eye."  
Meekly the girl withdrew to a safer distance. From there

she read with amazement the six typewritten lines which was all that the letter proved to be. They read thus:

Your father asks that, if you have any of the natural feelings of a son, you will at once leave New York and take up your residence in this city. This is the first request he has ever made of you, as it will be, if you refuse it, the last. But he earnestly begs that you will comply with it, anticipating that it will be to your decided advantage to do so.

"The envelope that that came in," said Queed, briskly laying it down. "Now here 's the envelope that the twenty dollars came in — it is exactly like the other two, you observe. — The last exhibit is somewhat remarkable; it came yesterday. Read that."

Sharlee required no urging. She read:

Make friends; mingle with people, and learn to like them. This is the earnest injunction of

Your father.

"Note especially," said the young man, "the initial Q on each of the three envelopes. You will observe that the tail in every instance is defective in just the same way."

Sure enough, the tail of every Q was broken off short near the root, like the rudimentary tail anatomists find in Genus Homo. Mr. Queed looked at her with scholarly triumph.

"I suppose that removes all doubt," said she, "that all these came from the same person."

"Unquestionably. — Well? What do they suggest to you?"

A circle of light from the green-shaded desk-lamp beat down on the three singular exhibits. Sharlee studied them with bewilderment mixed with profound melancholy.

"Is it conceivable," said she, hesitatingly — "I only suggest this because the whole thing seems so extraordinary — that somebody is playing a very foolish joke on you?"

He stared. "Who on earth would wish to joke with me?"

Of course he had her there. "I wish," she said, "that you would tell me what you yourself think of them."

"I think that my father must be very hard up for something to do."

"Oh — I don't think I should speak of it in that way if I were you."

"Why not? If he cites filial duty to me, why shall I not cite paternal duty to him? Why should he confine his entire relations with me in twenty-four years to two preposterous detective-story letters?"

Sharlee said nothing. To tell the truth, she thought the behavior of Queed Senior puzzling in the last degree.

"You grasp the situation? He knows exactly where I am; evidently he has known it all along. He could come to see me to-night; he could have come as soon as I arrived here three months ago; he could have come five, ten, twenty years ago, when I was in New York. But instead he elects to write these curious letters, apparently seeking to make a mystery, and throwing the burden of finding him on me. Why should I become excited over the prospect? If he would promise to endow me now, to support or pension me off, if I found him, that would be one thing. But I submit to you that no man can be expected to interrupt a most important life-work in consideration of a single twenty-dollar bill. And that is the only proof of interest I ever had from him. No —" he broke off suddenly — "no, that's hardly true after all. I suppose it was he who sent the money to Tim."

"To Tim?"

"Tim Queed."

Presently she gently prodded him. "And do you want to tell me who Tim Queed is?"

He eyed her thoughtfully. If the ground of his talk appeared somewhat delicate, nothing could have been more matter-of-fact than the way he tramped it. Yet now he

palpably paused to ask himself whether it was worth his while to go more into detail. Yes; clearly it was. If it ever became necessary to ask the boarding-house agent to find his father for him, she would have to know what the situation was, and now was the time to make it plain to her once and for all.

"He is the man I lived with till I was fourteen; one of my friends, a policeman. For a long time I supposed, of course, that Tim was my father, but when I was ten or twelve, he told me, first that I was an orphan who had been left with him to bring up, and later on, that I had a father somewhere who was not in a position to bring up children. That was all he would ever say about it. I became a student while still a little boy, having educated myself practically without instruction of any sort, and when I was fourteen I left Tim because he married at that time, and, with the quarreling and drinking that followed, the house became unbearable. Tim then told me for the first time that he had, from some source, funds equivalent to twenty-five dollars a month for my board, and that he would allow me fifteen of that, keeping ten dollars a month for his services as agent. You follow all this perfectly? So matters went along for ten years, Tim bringing me the fifteen dollars every month and coming frequently to see me in between, often bringing along his brother Murphy, who is a yeggman. Last fall came this letter, purporting to be from my father. Absurd as it appeared to me, I decided to come. Tim said that, in that case, he would be compelled to cut off the allowance entirely. Nevertheless, I came."

Sharlee had listened to this autobiographical sketch with close and sympathetic attention. "And now that you are here — and settled — have n't you decided to do something —?"

He leaned back in his swivel chair and stared at her. "Do something! Have n't I done all that he asked? Have n't I given up fifteen dollars a month for him? Decidedly, the next move is his."

"But if you meant to take no steps when you got here, why did you come?"

"To give him his chance, of course. One city is exactly like another to me. All that I ask of any of them is a table and silence. Apart from the forfeiture of my income, living here and living there are all one. Do! You talk of it glibly enough, but what is there to do? There are no Queeds in this city. I looked in the directory this morning. In all probability that is not his name anyway. Kindly bear in mind that I have not the smallest clue to proceed upon, even had I the time and willingness to proceed upon it."

"I am obliged to agree with you," she said, "in thinking that your —"

"Besides," continued Doctor Queed, "what reason have I for thinking that he expects or desires me to track him down? For all that he says here, that may be the last thing in the world he wishes."

Sharlee, turning toward him, her chin in her white-gloved hand, looked at him earnestly.

"Do you care to have me discuss it with you?"

"Oh, yes, I have invited an expression of opinion from you."

"Then I agree with you in thinking that your father is not treating you fairly. His attitude toward you is extraordinary, to say the least of it. But of course there must be some good reason for this. Has it occurred to you that he may be in some — situation where it is not possible for him to reveal himself to you?"

"Such as what?"

"Well, I don't know —"

"Why does n't he say so plainly in his letters then?"

"I don't know."

The young man threw out his hands with a gesture which inquired what in the mischief she was talking about then.

"Here is another thought," said Sharlee, not at all disconcerted. "Have you considered that possibly he may be doing this way — as a test?"

"Test of what?"

"Of you. I mean that, wanting to — to have you with him now, he is taking this way of finding out whether or not you want him. Don't you see what I mean? He appeals here to the natural feelings of a son, and then again he tells you to make friends and learn to like people. Evidently he is expecting something of you — I don't know exactly what. But don't you think, perhaps, that if you began a search for him, he would take it as a sign —"

"I told you that there was no way in which a search, as you call it, could be begun. Nor, if there were, have I the smallest inclination to begin it. Nor, again, if I had, could I possibly take the time from My Book."

She was silent a moment. "There is, of course, one way in which you could find out at any moment."

"Indeed! What is that, pray?"

"Mr. Tim Queed."

He smiled faintly but derisively. "Hardly. Of course Tim knows all about it. He told me once that he was present at the wedding of my parents; another time that my mother died when I was born. But he would add, and will add, not a word to these confidences; not even to assure me definitely that my father is still alive. He says that he has sworn an oath of secrecy. I called on him before I left New York. No, no; I may discover my father or he may discover me, or not, but we can rest absolutely assured that I shall get no help from Tim."

"But you can't mean simply to sit still —"

"And leave matters to him. I do."

"But — but," she still protested, "he is evidently unhappy, Mr. Queed — evidently counting on you for something —"

"Then let him come out like a man and say plainly what he wants. I cannot possibly drop my work to try to solve entirely superfluous enigmas. Keep all this in mind — take an interest in it, will you?" he added briskly. "Possibly I might need your help some day."

"Certainly I will. I appreciate your telling me about it and I'd be so glad to help you in any way that I could."

"How do you like my editorials?" he demanded abruptly.

"I'm afraid I don't understand a line of them!"

He waved his hand indulgently, like a grandfather receiving the just tribute of his little ones. "They are for thinkers, experts," said he, and picked up his pencil.

The agent took the hint; pushed back her chair; her glove was unbuttoned and she slowly fastened it. In her heart was a great compassion for the little Doctor.

"Mr. Queed, I want you to know that if I ever could be of help to you about *anything*, I'd always think it a real pleasure. Please remember that, won't you? Did you know I lived down this way, in the daytime?"

"Lived?"

She made a gesture toward the window, and away to the south and east. "My office is only three blocks away, down there in the park—"

"Your office? You don't work!"

"Oh, don't I though!"

"Why, I thought you were a *lady*!"

They were so close together that she was compelled to laugh full in his face, disclosing two rows of splendid little teeth and the tip of a rosy little tongue. Probably she could have crushed him by another pointing gesture, turned this time toward her honored great-grandfather who stood in marble in the square; but what was the use?

"What are you laughing at?" he inquired mildly.

"At your definition of a lady. Where on earth did you get it? Out of those laws of human society you write every night at my aunt's?"

"No," said he, the careful scientist at once, "no, I admit, if you like, that I used the term in a loose, popular sense. I would not seriously contend that females of gentle birth and breeding — ladies in the essential sense — are never engaged in gainful occupations —"

"You should n't," she laughed, "not in this city at any rate. It might astonish you to know how many females of gentle birth and breeding are engaged in gainful occupations on this one block alone. It was not ever thus with them. Once they had wealth and engaged in nothing but delicious leisure. But in 1861 some men came down here, about six to one, and took all this wealth away from them, at the same time exterminating the males. Result: the females, ladies in the essential sense, must either become gainful or starve. They have not starved. Sociologically, it's interesting. Make Colonel Cowles tell you about it some time."

"He has told me about it. In fact he tells me constantly. And this work that you do," he said, not unkindly and not without interest, "what is it? Are you a teacher, perhaps, a . . . no! — You speak of an office. You are a clerk, doubtless, a bookkeeper, a stenographer, an office girl?"

She nodded with exaggerated gravity. "You have guessed my secret. I am a clerk, bookkeeper, stenographer, and office girl. My official title, of course, is a little more frilly, but you describe —"

"Well? What is it?"

"They call it Assistant Secretary of the State Department of Charities."

He looked astonished; she had no idea his face could take on so much expression.

"You! *You!* Why, how on earth did you get such a position?"

"Pull," said Sharlee.

Their eyes met, and she laughed him down.

"Who is the real Secretary to whom you are assistant?"

"The nicest man in the world. Mr. Dayne — Rev. George Dayne."

"A parson! Does he know anything about his subject? Is he an expert? — a trained relief worker? Does he know Willoughby? And Smathers? And Conant?"

"Knows them by heart. Quotes pages of them at a time in his letters without ever glancing at the books."

"And you?"

"I may claim some familiarity with their theories."

He fussed with his pencil. "I recall defining sociology for you one night at my boarding-house. . . ."

"I remember."

"Well," said he, determined to find something wrong, "those men whom I mentioned to you are not so good as they think, particularly Smathers. I may as well tell you that I shall show Smathers up completely in my book."

"We shall examine your arguments with care and attention. We leave no stone unturned to keep abreast of the best modern thought."

"It is extraordinary that such a position should be held by a girl like you, who can have no scientific knowledge of the many complex problems. . . . However," he said, a ray of brightness lightening his displeasure, "your State is notoriously backward in this field. Your department, I fancy, can hardly be more than rudimentary."

"It will be much, much more than that in another year or two. Why, we're only four years old!"

"So this is why you are interested in having editorials written about reformatories. It is a reformatory for women that you wish to establish?"

"How did you know?"

"I merely argue from the fact that your State is so often held up to reproach for lack of one. What is the plan?"

"We are asking," said the Assistant Secretary, "for a hundred thousand dollars—sixty thousand to buy the land and build, forty thousand for equipment and two years' support. Modest enough, is it not? Of course we shall not get a penny from the present legislature. Legislatures love to say no; it dearly flatters their little vanity. We are giving them the chance to say no now. Then when they meet again, two years from now, we trust that they will be ready to give us what we ask—part of it, at any rate. We can make a start with seventy-five thousand dollars."

Queed was moved to magnanimity. "Look here. You have been civil to me—I will write that article for you Myself."

While Sharlee had become aware that the little Doctor was interested, really interested, in talking social science with her, she thought he must be crazy to offer such a contribution of his time. A guilty pink stole into her cheek. A reformatory article by Mr. Queed would doubtless be scientifically pluperfect, but nobody would read it. Colonel Cowles, on the other hand, had never even heard of Willoughby and Smathers; but when he wrote an article people read it, and the humblest understood exactly what he was driving at.

"Why—it's very nice of you to offer to help us, but I could n't think of imposing on your time—"

"Naturally not," said he, decisively; "but it happens that we have decided to allow a breathing-space in my series on taxation, that the public may digest what I have already written. I am therefore free to discuss other topics for a few days. For to-morrow's issue, I am analyzing certain little understood industrial problems in Bavaria. On the following day—"

"It's awfully good of you to think of it," said Sharlee, embarrassed by his grave gaze. "I can't tell you how I appreciate it. But—but—you see, there's a lot of special detail that applies to this particular case alone—oh, a great lot of it—little facts connected with peculiar State conditions and—and the history of our department, you know—and I have talked it over so thoroughly with the Colonel—"

"Here is Colonel Cowles now."

She breathed a sigh. Colonel Cowles, entering with the breath of winter upon him, greeted her affectionately. Queed, rather relieved that his too hasty offer had not been accepted, noted with vexation that his conversation with the agent had cost him eighteen minutes of time. Vigorously he readdressed himself to the currency problems of.

the Bavarians; the girl's good-night, as applied to him, fell upon ears deafer than any post.

Sharlee walked home through the tingling twilight; fourteen blocks, and she did them four times a day. It was a still evening, clear as a bell and very cold; already stars were pushing through the dim velvet round; all the world lay white with a light hard snow, crusted and sparkling under the street lights. Her private fear about the whole matter was that Queed Senior was a person of a criminal mode of life, who, discovering the need of a young helper, was somehow preparing to sound and size up his long-neglected son.

## VII

*In which an Assistant Editor, experiencing the Common Desire to thrash a Proof-Reader, makes a Humiliating Discovery; and of how Trainer Klinker gets a Pupil the Same Evening.*

THE industrial problems of the Bavarians seemed an inoffensive thesis enough, but who can evade Destiny?

Queed never read his own articles when they appeared in print in the *Post*. In this peculiarity he may be said to have resembled all the rest of the world, with the exception of the Secretary of the Tax Reform League, and the Assistant Secretary of the State Department of Charities. But not by any such device, either, can a man elude his Fate. On the day following his conversation with Mrs. Paynter's agent, Fortune gave Queed to hear a portion of his article on the Bavarians read aloud, and read with derisive laughter.

The incident occurred on a street-car, which he had taken because of the heavy snow-fall: another illustration of the tiny instruments with which Providence works out its momentous designs. Had he not taken the car — he was on the point of not taking it, when one whizzed invitingly up — he would never have heard of the insult that the *Post's* linotype had put upon him, and the course of his life might have been different. As it was, two men on the next seat in front were reading the *Post* and making merry.

" . . . 'A lengthy procession of fleas harassed the diet.' Now what in the name of Bob . . ."

Gradually the sentence worked its way into the closed fastness of the young man's mind. It had a horrible familiarity, like a ghastly parody on something known and dear.