XVII

A Remeeting in a Cemetery: the Unglassed Queed who loafed on Rustic Bridges; of the Consequences of failing to tell a Lady that you hope to see her again soon.

FIFI'S grave had long since lost its first terrible look of bare newness. Grass grew upon it in familiar ways. Rose-bushes that might have stood a lifetime nodded over it by night and by day. Already "the minute grey lichens, plate o'er plate," were "softening down the crisp-cut name and date"; and the winds of winter and of summer blew over a little mound that had made itself at home in the still city of the dead.

Green was the turf above Fifi, sweet the peacefulness of her little churchyard. Her cousin Sharlee, who had loved her well, disposed her flowers tenderly, and stood awhile in reverie of the sort which the surroundings so irresistibly invited. But the schedules of even electric car-lines are inexorable; and presently she saw from a glance at her watch that she must turn her face back to the city of the living.

On the little rustic bridge a hundred yards away, a man was standing, with rather the look of having stopped at just that minute. From a distance Sharlee's glance swept him lightly; she saw that she did not know him; and not fancying his frank stare, she drew near and stepped upon the bridge with a splendid unconsciousness of his presence. But just when she was safely by, her ears were astonished by his voice speaking her name.

"How do you do, Miss Weyland?"

She turned, surprised by a familiar note in the deep tones, looked, and — yes, there could be no doubt of it — it was —

"Mr. Queed! Why, *how* do you do!"

They shook hands. He removed his hat for the process, doing it with a certain painstaking precision which betrayed want of familiarity with the engaging rite.

"I have n't seen you for a long time," said Sharlee brightly.

The dear, old remark — the moss-covered remark that hung in the well! How on earth could we live without it? In behalf of Sharlee, however, some excuses can be urged; for, remembering the way she had talked to Mr. Queed once on the general subject of failures, she found herself struggling against a most absurd sense of embarrassment.

"No," replied Queed, replacing his hat as though following from memory the diagram in a book of etiquette. He added, borrowing one of the Colonel's favorite expressions, "I hope you are very well."

"Yes, indeed. . . . I'm so glad you spoke to me, for to tell you the truth, I never, never should have known you if you had n't."

"You think that I've changed? Well," said he, gravely, "I ought to have. You might say that I've given five months to it."

"You've changed enormously."

She examined with interest this new Mr. Queed who loafed on rustic bridges, five miles from a Sociology, and hailed passing ladies on his own motion. He appeared, indeed, decidedly altered.

In the first place, he looked decidedly bigger, and, to come at once to the fact, he was. For Klinker's marvelous exercises for all parts of the body had done more than add nineteen pounds to his weight, and deepen his chest, and broaden his shoulders. They had pulled and tugged at the undeveloped tissues until they had actually added a hard-won three-quarters of an inch to his height. The stoop was gone, and instead of appearing rather a small man, Mr. Queed now looked full middle-height or above. He wore a well-made suit of dark blue, topped by a correct derby. His hair was cut trim, his color was excellent, and, last miracle of all, he wore no spectacles. It was astonishing but true. The

beautiful absence of these round disfigurements brought into new prominence a pair of grayish eyes which did not look so very professorial, after all.

But what Sharlee liked best about this unglassed and unscienced Mr. Queed was his entire absence of any self-consciousness in regard to her. When he told her that Easter Monday night that he cheerfully took his turn on the psychological operating-table, anæsthetics barred, and no mercy asked or given, it appeared that he, alone among men, really meant it.

Under the tiny bridge, a correspondingly tiny brook purled without surcease, its heart set upon somewhere finding the sea. Over their heads a glorious maple was taking off its coat of many colors in the wind. Sharlee put back a small hand into a large muff and said:—

"At church this morning I saw Colonel Cowles. He told me about you. I don't know how you look at it, but I think you're a subject for the heartiest congratulations. So here are mine."

"The men at the Mercury were pleased, too," mused Mr. Queed, looking out over the landscape. "Do you ever read my articles now?"

"For many years," said Sharlee, evasively, "I have always read the *Post* from cover to cover. It's been to me like those books you see in the advertisements and nowhere else. Grips the reader from the start, and she cannot lay it down till the last page is turned."

A brief smile appeared in the undisguised eyes. "Do you notice any distinctions now between me and the Encyclopedia Britannica?"

"Unless you happen to refer to Lombroso or Buckle or Aristotle or Plato," said Sharlee, not noticing the smile, "I never know whether it's your article or Colonel Cowles's. Do you mind walking on? It's nearly time for my car."

"A year ago," said he, "I certainly should not have liked that. I do now, since it means that I have succeeded in what I set out to do. I've thought a good deal about

that tired bricklayer this summer," he went on, quite unembarrassed. "By the way, I know one personally now: Timrod Burns, of the Mercury. Only I can't say that I ever saw Timmy tired."

Down the woodland path they passed side by side, headed for the little station known as Stop 11. Sharlee was pleased that he had remembered about the bricklayer; she could have been persuaded that his remark was vaguely intended to convey some sort of thanks to her. But saying no more of this, she made it possible to introduce casually a reference to his vanished glasses.

"Yes," said he, "I knocked them off the bureau and broke them one day. So I just let them go. They were rather striking-looking glasses, I always thought. I don't believe I ever saw another pair quite like them."

"But," said Sharlee, puzzled, "do you find that you can see perfectly well without them?"

"Oh, yes; if anything, better." He paused, and added with entire seriousness: "You see those spectacles, striking-looking as they were, were only window-glass. I bought them at a ten-cent store on Sixth Avenue when I was twelve years old."

"Oh! What made you do that?"

"All the regulars at the Astor Library wore them. At the time it seemed to be the thing to do, and of course they soon became second nature to me. But I daresay no one ever had a sounder pair of eyes than I."

To Sharlee this seemed one of the most pathetic of all his confidences; she offered no comment.

"You were in the churchyard," stated Mr. Queed. "I was there just ahead of you. I was struck with that motto or text on the headstone, and shall look it up when I get home. I have been making a more careful study of your Bible this autumn and have found it exceptionally interesting. You, I suppose, subscribe to all the tenets of the Christian faith?"

Sharlee hesitated. "I'm not sure that I can answer that

with a direct yes, and I *will* not answer it with any sort of no. So I'll say that I believe in them all, modified a little in places to satisfy my reason."

"Ah, they are subject to modification, then?"

"Certainly. Are n't you? Am not I? Whatever is alive is subject to modification. These doctrines," said she, "are evolving because they have the principle of life in them."

"So you are an evolutionist?"

"The expert in evolutionary sociology will hardly quarrel with me for that."

"The expert in evolutionary sociology deals with social organisms, nations, the human race. Your Bible deals with Smith, Brown, and Jones."

"Well, what are your organisms and nations but collections of my Smiths, Browns, and Joneses? My Bible deals with individuals because there is nothing else to deal with. The individual conscience is the beginning of everything."

"Ah! So you would found your evolution of humanity upon the increasing operation of what you call conscience?"

"Probably I would not give *all* the credit to what I call conscience. Probably I'd give some of it to what I call intellect."

"In that case you would almost certainly fall into a fatal error."

"Why, don't you consider that the higher the intellectual development the higher the type?"

"Suppose we go more slowly," said Mr. Queed, intently plucking a dead bough from an overhanging young oak. "How do you go about measuring a type? When you speak of a high type, exactly what do you mean?"

"When I speak of a high type," said Sharlee, who really did not know exactly what she meant, "I will merely say that I mean a type that is high — lofty, you know — towering over other types."

She flaunted a gloved hand to suggest infinite altitude.

"You ought to mean," he said patiently, "a type which most successfully sketches the civilization of the future, a

type best fitted to dominate and survive. Now you have only to glance at history to see that intellectual supremacy is no guarantee whatever of such a type."

"Oh, Mr. Queed, I don't know about that."

"Then I will convince you," said he. "Look at the French — the most brilliant nation intellectually among all the European peoples. Where are they in the race to-day? The evolutionist sees in them familiar symptoms of a retrogression which rarely ends but in one way. Look at the Greeks. Every schoolboy knows that the Greeks were vastly the intellectual superiors of any dominant people of to-day. An anthropologist of standing assures us that the intellectual interval separating the Greek of the Periclean age from the modern Anglo-Saxon is as great as the interval between the Anglo-Saxon and the African savage. Point to a man alive to-day who is the intellectual peer of Aristotle, Plato, or Socrates. Yet where are the Greeks? What did their exalted intellectual equipment do to save them in the desperate struggle for the survival of the fittest? The Greeks of to-day are selling fruit at corner stands; Plato's descendants shine the world's shoes. They live to warn away the most casual evolutionist from the theory that intellectual supremacy necessarily means supremacy of type. Where, then, you may ask, does lie the principle of triumphant evolution? Here we stand at the innermost heart of every social scheme. Let us glance a moment," said Mr. Queed, "at Man, as we see him first emerging from the dark hinterlands of history."

So, walking through the sweet autumn woods with the one girl he knew in all the world — barring only Miss Miller — Queed spoke heartily of the rise and fall of peoples and the destiny of man. Thus conversing, they came out of the woods and stood upon the platform of the rudimentary station.

The line ran here on an elevation, disappearing in the curve of a heavy cut two hundred yards further north. In front the ground fell sharply and rolled out in a vast green meadow, almost treeless and level as a mill-pond. Far off on the horizon rose the blue haze of a range of foothills,

upon which the falling sun momentarily stood, like a gold-piece edge-up on a table. Nearer, to their right, was a strip of uncleared woods, a rainbow of reds and pinks. Through the meadow ran a little stream, such as a boy of ten could leap; for the instant it stood fire-red under the sun.

Sharlee, obtaining the floor for a moment, asked Queed how his own work had been going. He told her that in one sense it had not been going at all: not a chapter written from May to September.

"However," he said, with an unclouded face, "I am now giving six hours a day to it. And it is just as well to go slow. The smallest error of angle at the centre means a tremendous going astray at the circumference. I — ahem — do not feel that my summer has been wasted, by any means. You follow me? It is worth some delay to be doubly sure that I put down no plus signs as minuses."

"Yes, of course. How beautiful that is out there, is n't it?"

His eyes followed hers over the sunset spaces. "No, it is too quiet, too monotonous. If there must be scenery, let it have some originality and character. You yourself are very beautiful, I think."

Sharlee started, almost violently, and colored perceptibly. If a text-book in differential calculus, upon the turning of a page, had thrown problems to the winds and begun gibbering purple poems of passion, she could not have been more completely taken aback. However, there was no mistaking the utter and veracious impersonality of his tone.

"Oh, do you think so? I'm very glad, because I'm afraid not many people do. . . ."

Mr. Queed remained silent. So far, so good; the conversation stood in a position eminently and scientifically correct; but Sharlee could not for the life of her forbear to add: "But I had no idea you ever noticed people's looks."

"So far as I remember, I never did before. I think it was the appearance of your eyes as you looked out over the plain that attracted my attention. Then, looking closer, I noticed that you are beautiful."

The compliment was so unique and perfect that another touch could only spoil it. Sharlee immediately changed the subject.

"Oh, Mr. Queed, has the Department you or Colonel Cowles to thank for the editorial about the reformatory this morning?"

"Both of us. He suggested it and I wrote it. So you really cannot tell us apart?"

She shook her head. "All this winter we shall work preparing the State's mind for this institution, convincing it so thoroughly that when the legislature meets again, it simply will not dare to refuse us. When I mention we and us, understand that I am speaking to you Departmentally. After that there are ten thousand other things that we want to do. But everything is so immortally slow! We are not allowed to raise our fingers without a hundred years' war first. Don't you ever wish for money — oceans and oceans of lovely money?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"I do. I'd pepper this State with institutions. Did you know," she said sweetly, "that I once had quite a little pot of money? When I was one month old."

"Yes," said Queed, "I knew. In fact, I had not been here a week before I heard of Henry G. Surface. Major Brooke speaks of him constantly, Colonel Cowles occasionally. Do you," he asked, "care much about that?"

"Well," said Sharlee, gently, "I'm glad my father never knew."

From half a mile away, behind the bellying woodland, a faint hoot served notice that the city-bound car was sweeping rapidly toward them. It was on the tip of Queed's tongue to remind Miss Weyland that, in the case of Fifi, she had taken the ground that the dead did know what was going on upon earth. But he did not do so. The proud way in which she spoke of *my father* threw another thought uppermost in his mind.

"Miss Weyland," he said abruptly, "I made a — confi-

dence to you, of a personal nature, the first time I ever talked with you. I did not, it is true, ask you to regard it as a confidence, but — "

"I know," interrupted Sharlee, hurriedly. "But of course I *have* regarded it in that way, and have never spoken of it to anybody."

"Thank you. That was what I wished to say."

If Sharlee had wanted to measure now the difference that she saw in Mr. Queed, she could have done it by the shyness that they both felt in approaching a topic they had once handled with the easiest simplicity. She was glad of his sensitiveness; it became him better than his early callousness. Sharlee wore a suit of black-and-gray pin-checks, and it was very excellently tailored; for if she purchased but two suits a year, she invariably paid money to have them made by one who knew how. Her hat was of the kind that other girls study with cool diligence, while feigning engrossment in the conversation; and, repairing to their milliners, give orders for accurate copies of it. From it floated a silky-looking veil of gray-white, which gave her face that airy, cloud-like setting that photographers of the baser sort so passionately admire. The place was as windy as Troy; from far on the ringing plains the breeze raced and fell upon this veil, ceaselessly kicking it here and there, in a way that would have driven a strong man lunatic in seven minutes. Sharlee, though a slim girl and no stronger than another, remained entirely unconscious of the behavior of the veil; long familiarity had bred contempt for its boisterous play; and, with her eyes a thousand miles away, she was wishing with her whole heart that she dared ask Mr. Queed a question.

Whereupon, like her marionette that she worked by a string, he opened his mouth and gravely answered her.

"I have three theories about my father. One is that he is an eccentric psychologist with peculiar, not to say extraordinary, ideas about the bringing up of children. Another is that because of his own convenience or circumstances, he does not care to own me as I am now. The third is that

because of my convenience or circumstances, he thinks that I may not care to own him as he is now. I have never heard of or from him since the letter I showed you, nearly nine months ago. I rather incline to the opinion," he said, "that my father is dead."

"If he is n't," said Sharlee, gently, as the great car whizzed up and stopped with a jerk, "I am very sure that you are to find him some day. If he had n't meant that, he would never have asked you to come all the way from New York to settle here — do you think so?"

"Do you know," said Mr. Queed — so absorbedly as to leave her to clamber up the car steps without assistance — "if I subscribed to the tenets of your religion, I might believe that my father was merely a mythical instrument of Providence — a tradition created out of air *just to bring me down here.*"

"Why," said Sharlee, looking down from the tall platform, as the car whizzed and buzzed and slowly started, "are n't you *coming?*"

"No, I'm walking," said Mr. Queed, and remembered at the last moment to pluck off his glistening new derby.

Thus they parted, almost precipitately, and, for all of him, might never have met again in this world. Half a mile up the road, it came to the young man that their farewell had lacked that final word of ceremony to which he now aspired. To those who called at his office, to the men he met at the sign of the Mercury, even to Nicolovius when he betook himself from the lamplit sitting-room, it was his carefully attained habit to say: "I hope to see you again soon." He meant the hope, with these, only in the most general and perfunctory sense. Why, then, had he omitted this civil tag and postscript in his parting with Miss Weyland, to whom he could have said it — yes, certainly — with more than usual sincerity? Certainly; he really did hope to see her again soon. For she was an intelligent, sensible girl, and knew more about him than anybody in the world except Tim Queed.

Gradually it was borne in upon him that the reason he had failed to tell Miss Weyland that he hoped to see her again soon was exactly the fact that he did hope to see her again soon. Off his guard for this reason, he had fallen into a serious lapse. Looking with untrained eyes into the future, he saw no way in which a man who had failed to tell a lady that he hoped to see her again soon was ever to retrieve his error. It was good-by, Charles Weyland, for sure.

However, Miss Weyland herself resolved all these perplexities by appearing at Mrs. Paynter's supper-table before the month was out; and this exploit she repeated at least once, and maybe twice, during the swift winter that followed.

On January 14, or February 23, or it might have been March 2, Queed unexpectedly reëntered the dining-room, toward eight o'clock, with the grave announcement that he had a piece of news. Sharlee was alone in the room, concluding the post-prandial chores with the laying of the Turkey-red cloth. She was in fickle vein this evening, as it chanced; and instead of respectfully inquiring the nature of his tidings, as was naturally and properly expected of her, she received the young man with a fire of breezy inconsequentialities which puzzled and annoyed him greatly.

She admitted, without pressure, that she had been hoping for his return; had in fact been dawdling over the duties of the dining-room on that very expectation. From there her fancy grew. Audaciously she urged his reluctant attention to the number of her comings to Mrs. Paynter's in recent months. With an exceedingly stagey counterfeit of a downcast eye, she hinted at gossip lately arising from public observation of these visits: gossip, namely, to the effect that Miss Weyland's ostensible suppings with her aunt were neither better nor worse than so many bold calls upon Mr. Queed. Her lip quivered alarmingly over such a confession; undoubtedly she looked enormously abashed.

Mr. Queed, for his part, looked highly displeased and more than a shade uncomfortable. He annihilated all such foolishness by a look and a phrase; observed, in a stately opening, that she would hardly trouble to deny empty rumor of this sort, since —

"I can't deny it, you see! Because," she interrupted, raising her eyes and turning upon him a sudden dazzling yet outrageous smile — "*it 's true.*"

She skipped away, smiling to herself, happily putting things away and humming an air. Queed watched her in annoyed silence. His adamantine gravity inspired her with an irresistible impulse to levity; so the law of averages claimed its innings.

"While you are thinking up what to say," she rattled on, "might I ask your advice on a sociological problem that was just laid before me by Laura?"

"Well," he said impatiently, "who is Laura?"

"Laura is the loyal negress who cooks the food for Mrs. Paynter's bright young men. Her husband first deserted her, next had the misfortune to get caught while burgling, and is at present doing time, as the saying is. Now a young bright-skin negro desires to marry Laura, and speaks in urgent tones of the divorce court. Her attitude is more than willing, but she learns that a divorce, at the lowest conceivable price, will cost fifteen dollars, and she had rather put the money in a suit and bonnet. But a thought no larger than a man's hand has crossed her mind, and she said to me just now: 'I 'clare, Miss Sharly, it do look like, when you got a beau and he want to marry you, and all the time axin' and coaxin' an' beggin' you to get a div-o'ce, it do look like *he* ought to pay for the div-o'ce.' Now what answer has your old science to give to a real heart problem such as that?"

"May I ask that you will put the napkins away, or at the least remain stationary? It is impossible for me to talk with you while you flutter about in this way."

At last she came and sat down meekly at the table, her hands clasped before her in rather a devotional attitude, while he, standing, fixed her with his unwavering gaze.

"I speak to you," he began, uncompromisingly, "as to Mrs. Paynter's agent. Professor Nicolovius is going to move in the spring and take an apartment or small house. He has invited me to share such apartment or house with him."

"What! But you declined?"

"On the contrary, I accepted at once."

Mrs. Paynter's agent was much surprised and interested by this news, and said so. "But how in the world," she went on, puzzled, "did you make him like you so? I always supposed that he hated everybody — he does me, I know."

"I believe he does hate everybody but me."

"Strange — extraordinary!" said Sharlee, picturing the two scholars alone together in their flat, endeavoring to soft-boil eggs on one of those little fixtures over the gas.

"I can see nothing in the least extraordinary in the refusal of a cultured gentleman to hate me."

"I don't mean it that way at all — not at all! But Professor Nicolovius must know cultured gentlemen, congenial roomers, who are nearer his own age —"

"Oh, not necessarily," said Queed, and sat down in the chair by her, Major Brooke's chair. "He is a most unsocial sort of man," — this from the little Doctor! — "and I doubt if he knows anybody better than he knows me. That he knows me so well is due solely to the fact that we have been forced on each other three times a day for over a year. For the first month or so after I came here, we remained entire strangers, I remember, and passed each other on the stairs without speaking. Gradually, however, he has come to take a great fancy to me."

"And is that why you are going off to a honeymoon cottage with him?"

"Hardly. I am going because it will be the best sort of arrangement for me."

"Oh!"

"I will pay, you see," said Queed, "no more than I am paying here; for that matter, I have no doubt that I could beat him down to five dollars a week, if I cared to do so.

In return I shall have decidedly greater comforts and conveniences, far greater quiet and independence, and complete freedom from interruptions and intrusions. The arrangement will be a big gain in several ways for me."

"And have you taken a great fancy to Professor Nicolovius, too?"

"Oh, no! — not at all. But that has very little to do with it. At least he has the great gift of silence."

Sharlee looked at his absorbed face closely. She thought that his head in profile was very fine, though certainly his nose was too prominent for beauty. But what she was wondering was whether the little Doctor had really changed so much after all.

"Well," said she, slowly, "I'm sorry you're going."

"Sorry — why? It would appear to me that under the tenets of your religion you ought to be glad. You ought to compliment me for going."

"I don't find anything in the tenets of my religion that requires you to go off and room-keep with Professor Nicolovius."

"You do not? It is a tremendous kindness to him, I assure you. To have a place of his own has long been his dream, he tells me; but he cannot afford it without the financial assistance I would give. Again, even if he could finance it, he would not venture to try it alone, because of his health. It appears that he is subject to some kind of attacks — heart, I suppose — and does not want to be alone. I have heard him walking his floor at 3 o'clock in the morning. Do you know anything about his life?"

"No. Nothing."

"I know everything."

He paused for her to ask him questions, that he might have the pleasure of refusing her. But instead of prying, Sharlee said: "Still I'm sorry that you are going."

"Well? Why?"

"Because," said Sharlee.

"Proceed."

"Because I don't like his eyes."

"The question, from your point of view," said Mr. Queed, "is a moral — not an optic one. These acts which confer benefits on others," he continued, "so peculiarly commended by your religion, are conceived by it to work moral good to the doer. The *eyes* (which you use synecdochically to represent the *character*) of the person to whom they are done, have nothing —"

"Mr. Queed," said Sharlee, briskly interrupting his exegetical words, "I believe you are going off with Professor Nicolovius chiefly because — you think he needs you!"

He looked up sharply, much surprised and irritated. "That is absolutely foolish and absurd. I have nothing in the world to do with what Professor Nicolovius needs. You must always remember that I am not a subscriber to the tenets of your religion."

"It is not too late. I always remember that too."

"But I must say frankly that I am much surprised at the way you interpret those tenets. For if —"

"Oh, you should never have tested me on such a question! Don't you see that I'm the judge sitting in his or her own case? Two boarders gone at one swoop! How shall I break the news to Aunt Jennie?"

He thought this over in silence and then said impatiently; "I'm sorry, but I do not feel that I can consider that phase of the matter."

"Certainly not."

"The arrangement between us is a strictly business one, based on mutual advantage, and to be terminated at will as the interests of either party dictates."

"Exactly."

He turned a sharp glance on her, and rose. Having risen he stood a moment, irresolute, frowning, troubled by a thought. Then he said, in an annoyed, nervous voice: —

"Look here, will it be a serious thing for your aunt to lose me?"

The agent burst out laughing. He was surprised by her merriment; he could not guess that it covered her instantaneous discovery that she liked him more than she would ever have thought possible.

"While I'm on the other side — remember that," said she, "I'm obliged to tell you that we can let the rooms any day at an hour's notice. Not that the places of our two scholars can ever be filled, but the boarding-house business is booming these days. We are turning them away. Do you remember the night that you walked in here an hour late for supper, and I arose and collected twenty dollars from you?"

"Oh, yes. . . . By the way — I have never asked — whatever became of that extraordinary pleasure-dog of yours?"

"Thank you. He is bigger and more pleasurable than ever. I take him out every afternoon, and each day, just as the clock strikes five, he knocks over a strange young man for me. It is delightful sport. But he has never found any young man that he enjoyed as heartily as he did you."

Gravely he moved toward the door. "I must return to my work. You will tell your aunt I have given notice? Well — good-evening."

"*Good*-evening, Mr. Queed."

The door half shut upon him, but opened again to admit his head and shoulders.

"By the way, there was a curious happening yesterday which might be of interest to you. Did you see it in the *Post* — a small item headed 'The Two Queeds'?"

"Oh — no! About you and Tim?"

"About Tim, but not about me. His beat was changed the other day, it seems, and early yesterday morning a bank in his new district was broken into. Tim went in and arrested the burglar after a desperate fight in the dark. When other policemen came and turned on the lights, Tim discovered to his horror that he had captured his brother Murphy."