

Do not, of course, misunderstand me. I have known you too well to believe for a moment that you can be swayed by ungenerous motives. I am very sure that you are taking now the part which you believe most generous. But that view is, I assure you, so far from the real facts that I can only conclude that you have refused to learn what these facts are. Both legally and morally the money is yours. No one else on earth has a shadow of claim to it. I most earnestly beg that, in fairness to me, you will at least give my attorneys the chance to convince yours that what I write here is true and unanswerable.

Should you adhere to your present position, the money will, of course, be trusteeed for your benefit, nor will a penny of it be touched until it is accepted, if not by you, then by your heirs or assigns. But I cannot believe that you will continue to find magnanimity in shirking your just responsibilities, and denying to me my right to wipe out this stain.

Very truly yours,

HENRY G. SURFACE, Jr.

No answer ever came to this letter, and there the matter rested through March and into the sultry April.

XXXI

God moves in a Mysterious Way: how the Finished Miss Avery appears as the Instrument of Providence; how Sharlee sees her Idol of Many Years go toppling in the Dust, and how it is her Turn to meditate in the Still Watches.

THE print danced before his outraged eyes; his chest heaved at the revolting evidence of man's duplicity; and Charles Gardiner West laid down his morning's Post with a hand that shook.

Meachy T. Bangor announces his candidacy for the nomination for Mayor, subject to the Democratic primary.

For West had not a moment's uncertainty as to what this announcement meant. Meachy T. Bangor spoke, nay invented, the language of the tribe. He was elect of the elect; what the silent powers that were thought was his thought; their ways were his ways, their people his people. When Meachy T. Bangor announced that he was a candidate for the nomination for Mayor, it meant that the all-powerful machine had already nominated him for Mayor, and whom the organization nominated it elected. Meachy T. Bangor! Plonny Neal's young, progressive candidate of the reformer type!

Bitterness flooded West's soul when he thought of Plonny. Had the boss been grossly deceived or grossly deceiving? Could that honest and affectionate eye, whose look of frank admiration had been almost embarrassing, have covered base and deliberate treachery? Was it possible that he, West, who had always been confident that he could see as far into a millstone as another, had been a cheap trickster's easy meat?

Day by day, since the appearance of the reformatory article, West had waited for some sign of appreciation and understanding from those on the inside. None had come. Not

a soul except himself, and Plonny, had appeared aware that he, by a masterly compromise, had averted disaster from the party, and clearly revealed himself as the young man of destiny. On the contrary, the House spokesmen, apparently utterly blind to any impending crisis, had, in the closing hours of the session, voted away some eighty thousand dollars of the hundred thousand rescued by West from the reformatory, in a multiplication of offices which it was difficult to regard as absolutely indispensable in a hard times year. This action, tallying so closely with what his former assistant had predicted, had bewildered and unsettled West; the continuing silence of the leaders — “the other leaders,” he had found himself saying — had led him into anxious speculations; and now, in a staggering burst, the disgraceful truth was revealed to him. They had used him, tricked and used him like a smooth tool, and having used him, had deliberately passed him, standing fine and patient in the line, to throw the mantle over the corrupt and unspeakable Bangor.

By heavens, it was not to be endured. Was it for this that he had left Blaines College, where a career of honorable usefulness lay before him; that he had sacrificed personal wishes and ambitions to the insistent statement that his City and State had need of him; that he had stood ten months in the line without a murmur; and that at last, confronted with the necessity of choosing between the wishes of his personal intimates and the larger good, he had courageously chosen the latter and suffered in silence the suspicion of having played false with the best friends he had in the world? Was it for this that he had lost his valuable assistant, whose place he could never hope to fill? — for this that he was referred to habitually by an evening contemporary as the Plonny Neal organ?

He was thoroughly disgusted with newspaper work this morning, disgusted with the line, disgusted with hopeful efforts to uplift the people. What did his *Post* work really amount to? — unremitting toil, the ceaseless forcing up of

immature and insincere opinions, no thanks or appreciation anywhere, and at the end the designation of the Plonny Neal organ. What did the uplift amount to? Could progress really ever be forced a single inch? And why should he wear out his life in the selfless service of those who, it seemed, acknowledged no obligation to him? As for public life, if this was a sample, the less he saw of it the better. He would take anything in the world sooner than a career of hypocrisy, double-dealing and treachery, of dirty looting in the name of the public good, of degrading traffic with a crew of liars and confidence men.

But through all the young man's indignation and resentment there ran an unsteady doubt, a miserable doubt of himself. Had his motives in the reformatory matter been as absolutely spotless as he had charmed himself into believing? . . . What manner of man was he? Was he really wanting in permanent convictions about anything? . . . Was it possible, was it thinkable or conceivable, that he was a complaisant invertebrate whom the last strong man that had his ear could play upon like a flute?

West passed a most unhappy morning. But at lunch, at the club, it was his portion to have his buoyant good-humor completely restored to him. He fell in with ancient boon companions; they made much of him; involved him in gay talk; smoothed him down, patted him on the head, found his self-esteem for him, and handed it over in its pristine vigor. Before he had sat half an hour at the merry table, he could look back at his profound depression of the morning with smiling wonder. Where in the world had he gotten his terrible grouch? Not a thing in the world had happened, except that the mayoralty was not going to be handed to him on a large silver platter. Was that such a fearful loss after all? On the contrary, was it not rather a good riddance? Being Mayor, in all human probability, would be a horrible bore.

It was a mild, azure, zephyrous day, spring at her brightest and best. West, descending the club steps, sniffed the

fragrant air affectionately, and was hanged if he would go near the office on such an afternoon. Let the *Post* readers plod along to-morrow with an editorial page both skimpy and inferior; anything he gave them would still be too good for them, middle-class drabs and dullards that they were.

The big red automobile was old now, and needed paint, but it still ran staunch and true; and Miss Avery had a face, a form, and a sinuous graceful manner, had veils and hats and sinuous graceful coats, that would have glorified a far less worthy vehicle. And she drove divinely. By invitation she took the wheel that afternoon, and with sure, clever hands whipped the docile leviathan over the hills and far away.

The world knows how fate uses her own instruments in her own way, frequently selecting far stranger ones than the delightful and wealthy Miss Avery. Now for more than a year this accomplished girl had been thinking that if Charles Gardiner West had anything to say to her, it was high time that he should say it. If she had not set herself to find out what was hobbling the tongue of the man she wanted, she would have been less than a woman; and Miss Avery was a good deal more. Hence, when she had seen West with Sharlee Weyland, and in particular on the last two or three times she had seen West with Sharlee Weyland, she had watched his manner toward that lady with profound misgivings, of the sort which starts every true woman to fighting for her own.

Now Miss Avery had a weapon, in the shape of valuable knowledge, or, at any rate, a valuable suspicion that had lately reached her: the suspicion, in short, which had somehow crept abroad as suspicions will, that West had done a certain thing which another man was supposed to have done. Therefore, when they turned homeward in the soft dusk, her man having been brought to exactly the right frame of mind, she struck with her most languorous voice.

"How is that dear little Charlotte Weyland? It seems to

me I have n't seen her for a year, though it was positively only last week."

"Oh! She seemed very well when I saw her last."

So Mr. West, of the lady he was going to marry. For, though he had never had just the right opportunity to complete the sweet message he had begun at the Byrds' one night, his mind was still quite made up on that point. It was true that the atmosphere of riches which fairly exuded from the girl now at his side had a very strong appeal for his lower instincts. But he was not a man to be ridden by his lower instincts. No; he had set his foot upon the fleshpots; his idealistic nature had overcome the world.

Miss Avery, sublimely unaware that Mr. West was going to offer marriage to her rival during the present month, the marriage itself to take place in October, indolently continued:—

"To my mind she's quite the most attractive dear little thing in town. I suppose she's quite recovered from her disappointment over the — hospital, or whatever it was?"

"Oh, I believe so. I never heard her mention it but once."

West's pleasant face had clouded a little. Through her fluttering veil she noted that fact with distinct satisfaction.

"I never met that interesting young Mr. Surface," said she, sweeping the car around a curve in the white road and evading five women in a surrey with polished skill. "But — truly, I have found myself thinking of him and feeling sorry for him more than once."

"Sorry for him — What about?"

"Oh, have n't you heard, then? It's rather mournful. You see, when Charlotte Weyland found out that he had written a certain editorial in the *Post* — you know more about this part of it than I —"

"But he did n't write it," said West, unhesitatingly. "I wrote it myself."

"You?"

She looked at him with frank surprise in her eyes; not too much frank surprise; rather as one who feels much but en-

deavors to suppress it for courtesy's sake. "Forgive me — I did n't know. There has been a little horrid gossip — but of course nearly every one has thought that he —"

"I'm sure I'm not responsible for what people think," said West, a little aggressively, but with a strangely sinking heart. "There has been not the slightest mystery or attempt at concealment —"

"Oh! Then of course Charlotte knows all about it now?"

"I don't know whether she does or not. When I tried to tell her the whole story," explained West, "soon after the incident occurred, she was so agitated about it, the subject seemed so painful to her, that I was forced to give it up. You can understand my position. Ever since, I have been waiting for an opportunity to take her quietly and straighten out the whole matter for her in a calm and rational way. For her part she has evidently regarded the subject as happily closed. Why under heaven should I press it upon her — merely to gain the academic satisfaction of convincing her that the *Post* acted on information superior and judgment sounder than her own?"

Miss Avery, now devoting herself to her chauffeur's duties through a moment of silence, was no match for Mr. West at the game of ethical debate, and knew it. However, she held a very strong card in her pongee sleeve, and she knew that too.

"I see — of course. You know I think you have been quite right through it all. And yet — you won't mind? — I can't help feeling sorry for Mr. Surface."

"Very well — you most mysterious lady. Go on and tell me why you can't help feeling sorry for Mr. Surface."

Miss Avery told him. How she knew anything about the private affairs of Mr. Surface and Miss Weyland, of which it is certain that neither of them had ever spoken, is a mystery, indeed: but Gossip is Argus and has a thousand ears to boot. Miss Avery was careful to depict Sharlee's attitude toward the unfortunate Mr. Surface as just severe enough to suggest to West that he must act at once, and not so

severe as to suggest to him — conceivably — the desirability, from a selfish point of view, of not acting at all. It was a task for a diplomat, which is to say a task for a Miss Avery.

"Rather fine of him, was n't it, to assume all the blame? — particularly if it's true, as people say," concluded Miss Avery, "that the man's in love with her and she cares nothing for him."

"Fine — splendid — but entirely unnecessary," said West.

The little story had disturbed him greatly. He had had no knowledge of any developments between Sharlee and his former assistant; and now he was unhappily conscious that he ought to have spoken weeks ago.

"I'm awfully sorry to hear this," he resumed, "for I am much attached to that boy. Still — if, as you say, everything is all right now —"

"Oh, but I don't know at all that it is," said Miss Avery, hastily. "That is just the point. The last I heard of it, she had forbidden him her house."

"That won't do," said Charles Gardiner West, in a burst of generosity. "I'll clear up that difficulty before I sleep to-night."

And he was as good as his word, or, let us say, almost as good. The next night but one he called upon Sharlee Weyland with two unalterable purposes in his mind. One was to tell her the full inside history of the reformatory article from the beginning. The other was to notify her in due form that she held his heart in permanent captivity.

To Miss Avery, it made not the slightest difference whether the gifted and charming editor of the *Post* sold out his principles for a price every morning in the month. At his pleasure he might fracture all of the decalogue that was refinedly fracturable, and so long as he rescued his social position intact from the ruin, he was her man just the same. But she had an instinct, surer than reasoned wisdom, that Sharlee Weyland viewed these matters differently. Therefore

she had sent West to make his little confession, face to face. And therefore West, after an hour of delightful tête-à-tête in the charming little back parlor, stiffened himself up, his brow sicklying o'er with the pale cast of disagreeable thought, and began to make it.

"I've got to tell you something about — a subject that won't be welcome to you," he plunged in, rather lugubriously. "I mean — the reformatory."

Sharlee's face, which had been merry and sweet, instantly changed and quieted at that word; interest sprang full-armed in her deep blue eyes.

"Have you? Tell me anything about it you wish."

"You remember that — last editorial in the *Post*?"

"Do you think that I forget so easily?"

West hardly liked that reply. Nor had he ever supposed that he would find the subject so difficult.

"Well! I was surprised and — hurt to learn — recently — that you had — well, had been rather severe with Surface, under the impression that — the full responsibility for that article was his."

Sharlee sat in the same flowered arm-chair she had once occupied to put this same Surface, then known as little Dr. Queed, in his place. Her heart warmed to West for his generous impulse to intercede. Still, she hardly conceived that her treatment of Mr. Surface was any concern of Mr. West's.

"And so?"

"I must tell you," he said, oddly uneasy under her straightforward look, "that — that you have made a mistake. The responsibility is mine."

"Ah, you mean that you, as the editor, are willing to take it."

"No," said West — "no"; and then suddenly he felt like a rash suicide, repentant at the last moment. Already the waters were rushing over his head; he felt a wild impulse to clutch at the life-belt she had flung out to him. It is to be remembered to his credit that he conquered it. "No, — I — I wrote the article myself."

"You?"

Her monosyllable had been Miss Avery's, but there resemblance parted. Sharlee sat still in her chair, and presently her lashes fluttered and fell. To West's surprise, a beautiful color swept upward from her throat to drown in her rough dark hair. "Oh," said she, under her breath, "I'm glad — so glad!"

West heaved a great sigh of relief. It was all over, and she was glad. Had n't he known all along that a woman will always forgive everything in the man she loves? She was glad because he had told her when another man might have kept silent. And yet her look perplexed him; her words perplexed him. Undoubtedly she must have something more to say than a mere expression of vague general gladness over the situation.

"Need I say that I never intended there should be any doubt about the matter? I meant to explain it all to you long ago, only there never seemed to be any suitable opportunity."

Sharlee's color died away. In silence she raised her eyes and looked at him.

"I started to tell you all about it once, at the time, but you know," he said, with a little nervous laugh, "you seemed to find the subject so extremely painful then — that I thought I had better wait till you could look at it more calmly."

Still she said nothing, but only sat still in her chair and looked at him.

"I shall always regret," continued West, laboriously, "that my — silence, which I assure you I meant in kindness, should have — Why do you look at me that way, Miss Weyland?" he said, with a quick change of voice. "I don't understand you."

Sharlee gave a small start and said: "Was I looking at you in any particular way?"

"You looked as mournful," said West, with that same little laugh, "as though you had lost your last friend. Now —"

"No, not my last one," said Sharlee.

"Well, don't look so sad about it," he said, in a voice of affectionate raillery. "I am quite unhappy enough over it without —"

"I'm afraid I can't help you to feel happier — not to-night. If I look sad, you see, it is because I feel that way."

"Sad?" he echoed, bewildered. "Why should you be sad now — when it is all going to be straightened out — when —"

"Well, don't you think it's pretty sad — the part that can't ever be straightened out?"

Unexpectedly she got up, and walked slowly away, a disconcerting trick she had; wandered about the room, looking about her something like a stranger in a picture gallery; touching a bowl of flowers here, there setting a book to rights; and West, rising too, following her sombrelly with his eyes, had never wanted her so much in all his life.

Presently she returned to him; asked him to sit down again; and, still standing herself, began speaking in a quiet kind voice which, nevertheless, rang ominously in his ears from her first word.

"I remember," said Sharlee, "when I was a very little girl, not more than twelve years old, I think, I first heard about you — about Charles Gardiner West. You were hardly grown then, but already people were talking about you. I don't remember now, of course, just what they said, but it must have been something very splendid, for I remember the sort of picture I got. I have always liked for men to be very clean and high-minded — I think because my father was that sort of man. I have put that above intellect, and abilities, and what would be called attractions; and so what they said about you made a great impression on me. You know how very young girls are — how they like to have the figure of a prince to spin their little romances around . . . and so I took you for mine. You were my knight without fear and without reproach . . . Sir Galahad. When I was sixteen, I used to pass you in the street and wonder if you

did n't hear my heart thumping. You never looked at me; you had n't any idea who I was. And that is a big and fine thing, I think — to be the hero of somebody you don't even know by name . . . though of course not so big and fine as to be the hero of somebody who knows you very well. And you were that to me, too. When I grew up and came to know you, I still kept you on that pedestal you never saw. I measured you by the picture I had carried for so many years, and I was not disappointed. All that my little girl's fancy had painted you, you seemed to be. I look back now over the last few years of my life, and so much that I have liked most — that has been dearest — has centred about you. Yes, more than once I have been quite sure that I . . . was in love with you. You wonder that I can show you my heart this way? I could n't of course, except — well — that it is all past now. And that is what seems sad to me. . . . There never was any prince; my knight is dead; and Sir Galahad I got out of a book. . . . Don't you think that that is pretty sad?"

West, who had been looking at her with a kind of frightened fascination, hastily averted his eyes, for he saw that her own had suddenly filled with tears. She turned away from him again; a somewhat painful silence ensued; and presently she broke it, speaking in a peculiarly gentle voice, and not looking at him.

"I'm glad that you told me — at last. I'll be glad to remember that . . . and I'm always your friend. But don't you think that perhaps we'd better finish our talk some other time?"

"No," said West. "No."

He pulled himself together, struggling desperately to throw off the curious benumbing inertia that was settling down upon him. "You are doing me an injustice. A most tremendous injustice. You have misunderstood everything from the beginning. I must explain —"

"Don't you think that argument will only make it all so much worse?"

"Nothing could possibly be worse for me than to have you think of me and speak to me in this way."

Obediently she sat down, her face still and sad; and West, pausing a moment to marshal his thoughts into convincing form, launched forth upon his defense.

From the first he felt that he did not make a success of it; was not doing himself justice. Recent events, in the legislature and with reference to Meachy T. Bangor, had greatly weakened his confidence in his arguments. Even to himself he seemed to have been strangely "easy"; his exposition sounded labored and hollow in his own ears. But worse than this was the bottomless despondency into which the girl's brief autobiography had strangely cast him. A vast mysterious depression had closed over him, which entirely robbed him of his usual adroit felicity of speech. He brought his explanation up to the publication of the unhappy article, and there abruptly broke off.

A long silence followed his ending, and at last Sharlee said:—

"I suppose a sudden change of heart in the middle of a fight is always an unhappy thing. It always means a good deal of pain for somebody. Still—sometimes they must come, and when they do, I suppose the only thing to do is to meet them honestly—though, personally, I think I should always trust my heart against my head. But . . . if you had only come to us that first morning and frankly explained just why you deserted us—if you had told us all this that you have just told me—"

"That is exactly what I wanted and intended to do," interrupted West. "I kept silent out of regard for you."

"Out of regard for me?"

"When I started to tell you all about it, that night at Mrs. Byrd's, it seemed to me that you had brooded over the matter until you had gotten in an overwrought and—overstrung condition about it. It seemed to me the considerate thing not to force the unwelcome topic upon you, but rather to wait—"

"But had you the right to consider my imaginary feelings in such a matter between yourself and . . . ? And besides, you did not quite keep silent, you remember. You said something that led me to think that you had discharged Mr. Surface for writing that article."

"I did not intend you to think anything of the kind. Anything in the least like that. If my words were ambiguous, it was because, seeing, as I say, that you were in an overstrung condition, I thought it best to let the whole matter rest until you could look at it calmly and rationally."

She made no reply.

"But why dwell on that part of it?" said West, beseechingly. "It was simply a wretched misunderstanding all around. I'm sorrier than I can tell you for my part in it. I have been greatly to blame—I can see that now. Can't you let bygones be bygones? I have come to you voluntarily and told you—"

"Yes, after six weeks. Why, I was the best friend he had, Mr. West, and—Oh, me! How can I bear to remember what I said to him!"

She turned her face hurriedly away from him. West, much moved, struggled on.

"But don't you see—I did n't know it! I never dreamed of such a thing. The moment I heard how matters stood—"

"Did it never occur to you in all this time that it might be assumed that Mr. Surface, having written all the reformatory articles, had written this one?"

"I did not think of that. I was short-sighted, I own. And of course," he added more eagerly, "I supposed that he had told you himself."

"You don't know him," said Sharlee.

A proud and beautiful look swept over her face. West rose, looking wretchedly unhappy, and stood, irresolute, facing her.

"Can't you—forgive me?" he asked presently, in a painful voice.

Sharlee hesitated.

"Don't you know I said that it would only make things worse to talk about it to-night?" she said gently. "Everything you say seems to put us further and further apart. Why, there is nothing for me to forgive, Mr. West. There was a situation, and it imposed a certain conduct on you; that is the whole story. I don't come into it at all. It is all a matter between you and — your own —"

"You do forgive me then? But no — you talk to me just as though you had learned all this from somebody else — as though I had not come to you voluntarily and told you everything."

Sharlee did not like to look at his face, which she had always seen before so confident and gay.

"No," said she sadly — "for I am still your friend."

"*Friend!*"

He echoed the word wildly, contemptuously. He was just on the point of launching into a passionate speech, painting the bitterness of friendship to one who must have true love or nothing, and flinging his hand and his heart impetuously at her feet. But looking at her still face, he checked himself, and just in time. Shaken by passion as he was, he was yet enough himself to understand that she would not listen to him. Why should he play the spendthrift and the wanton with his love? Why give her, for nothing, the sterile satisfaction of rejecting him, for her to prize, as he knew girls did, as merely one more notch upon her gun?

Leaving his tempestuous exclamation hanging in mid-air, West stiffly shook Sharlee's hand and walked blindly out of the room.

He went home, and to bed, like one moving in a horrible dream. That night, and through all the next day, he felt utterly bereft and wretched: something, say, as though flood and pestilence had swept through his dear old town and carried off everything and everybody but himself. He crawled alone in a smashed world. On the second day following, he found himself able to light a cigarette; and, glancing about him with faint pluckings of convalescent interest, began to

recognize some landmarks. On the third day, he was frankly wondering whether a girl with such overstrained, not to say hysterical ideals of conduct, would, after all, be a very comfortable person to spend one's life with.

On the evening of this day, about half-past eight o'clock, he emerged from his mother's house, light overcoat over his arm in deference to his evening clothes, and started briskly down the street. On the second block, as luck had it, he overtook Tommy Semple walking the same way.

"Gardiner," said Semple, "when are you going to get over all this uplift rot and come back to Semple and West?"

The question fell in so marvelously with West's mood of acute discontent with all that his life had been for the past two years, that it looked to him strangely like Providence. The easy ways of commerce appeared vastly alluring to him; his income, to say truth, had suffered sadly in the cause of the public; never had the snug dollars drawn him so strongly. He gave a slow, curious laugh.

"Why, hang it, Tommy! I don't know but I'm ready to listen to your siren spiel — now!"

In the darkness Semple's eyes gleamed. His receipts had never been so good since West left him.

"That's the talk! I need you in my business, old boy. By the bye, you can come in at bully advantage if you can move right away. I'm going to come talk with you to-morrow."

"Right's the word," said West.

At the end of that block a large house stood in a lawn, half hidden from the street by a curtain of trees. From its concealed veranda came a ripple of faint, slow laughter, advertising the presence of charming society. West halted.

"Here's a nice house, Tommy; I think I'll look in. See you to-morrow."

Semple, walking on, glanced back to see what house it was. It proved to be the brownstone palace leased for three years by old Mr. Avery, formerly of Mauch Chunk but now of Ours.

Sharlee, too, retired from her painful interview with West with a sense of irreparable loss. Her idol of so many years had, at a word, toppled off into the dust, and not all the king's horses could ever get him back again. It was like a death to her, and in most ways worse than a death.

She lay awake a long time that night, thinking of the two men who, for she could not say how long, had equally shared first place in her thoughts. And gradually she read them both anew by the blaze lit by one small incident.

She could not believe that West was deliberately false; she was certain that he was not deliberately false. But she saw now, as by a sudden searchlight flung upon him, that her one-time paladin had a fatal weakness. He could not be honest with himself. He could believe anything that he wanted to believe. He could hypnotize himself at will by the enchanting music of his own imaginings. He had pretty graces and he told himself they were large, fine abilities; dim emotions and he thought they were ideals; vague gropings of ambition, and when he had waved the hands of his fancy over them, presto, they had become great dominating purposes. He had fluttered fitfully from business to Blaines College; from the college to the *Post*; before long he would flutter on from the *Post* to something else — always falling short, always secretly disappointed, everywhere a failure as a man, though few might know it but himself. West's trouble, in fact, was that he was not a man at all. He was weakest where a real man is strongest. He was merely a chameleon taking his color from whatever he happened to light upon; a handsome boat which could never get anywhere because it had no rudder; an ornamental butterfly driving aimlessly before the nearest breeze. He meant well, in a general way, but his good intentions proved descending paving-stones because he was constitutionally incapable of meaning anything very hard.

West had had everything in the beginning except money; and he had the faculty of making all of that he wanted. Queed — she found that name still clinging to him in her

thoughts — had had nothing in the beginning except his fearless honesty. In everything else that a man should be; he had seemed to her painfully destitute. But because through everything he had held unflinchingly to his honesty, he had been steadily climbing the heights. He had passed West long ago, because their faces were set in opposite directions. West had had the finest distinctions of honor carefully instilled into him from his birth. Queed had deduced his, raw, from his own unswerving honesty. And the first acid test of a real situation showed that West's honor was only burnished and decorated dross, while Queed's, which he had made himself, was as fine gold. In that test, all superficial trappings were burned and shriveled away; men were made to show their men's colors; and the "queer little man with the queer little name" had instantly cast off his resplendent superior because contact with his superior's dishonesty was degrading to him. Yet in the same breath, he had allowed his former chief to foist off that dishonesty upon his own clean shoulders, and borne the detestable burden without demand for sympathy or claim for gratitude. And this was the measure of how, as Queed had climbed by his honesty, his whole nature had been strengthened and refined. For if he had begun as the most unconscious and merciless of egoists, who could sacrifice little Fifi to his comfort without a tremor, he had ended with the supreme act of purest altruism: the voluntary sacrifice of himself to save a man whom in his heart he must despise.

But was that the supreme altruism? What had it cost him, after all, but her friendship? Perhaps he did not regard that as so heavy a price to pay.

Sharlee turned her face to the wall. In the darkness, she felt the color rising at her throat and sweeping softly but resistlessly upward. And she found herself feverishly clinging to all that her little Doctor had said, and looked, in all their meetings which, remembered now, gave her the right to think that their parting had been hard for him, too.

Yet it was not upon their parting that her mind busied

itself most, but upon thoughts of their remeeting. The relations which she had thought to exist between them had, it was clear, been violently reversed. The one point now was for her to meet the topsy-turveyed situation as swiftly, as generously, and as humbly as was possible.

If she had been a man, she would have gone to him at once, hunted him up this very night, and told him in the most groveling language at her command, how infinitely sorry and ashamed she was. Lying wide-eyed in her little white bed, she composed a number of long speeches that she, as a man, would have made to him; embarrassing speeches which he, as a man, or any other man that ever lived, would never have endured for a moment. But she was not a man, she was a girl; and girls were not allowed to go to men, and say frankly and honestly what was in their hearts. She was not in the least likely to meet him by accident; the telephone was unthinkable. There remained only to write him a letter.

Yes, but what to say in the letter? There was the critical and crucial question. No matter how artful and cajoling an apology she wrote, she knew exactly how he would treat it. He would write a civil, formal reply, assuring her that her apology was accepted, and there the matter would stand forever. For she had put herself terribly in the wrong; she had betrayed a damning weakness; it was extremely probable that he would never care to resume friendship with one who had proved herself so hatefully mistrustful. Then, too, he was evidently very angry with her about the money. Only by meeting for a long, frank talk could she ever hope to make things right again; but not to save her life could she think of any form of letter which would bring such a meeting to pass.

Pondering the question, she fell asleep. All next day, whenever she had a minute and sometimes when she did not, she pondered it, and the next, and the next. Her heart smote her for the tardiness of her reparation; but stronger than this was her fear of striking and missing fire. And at last an idea

came to her; an idea so big and beautiful that it first startled and dazzled her, and then set her heart to singing; the perfect idea which would blot away the whole miserable mess at one stroke. She sat down and wrote Mr. Surface five lines, asking him to be kind enough to call upon her in regard to the business matter about which he had written her a few weeks before.

She wrote this note from her house, one night; she expected, of course, that he would come there to see her; she had planned out exactly where they were each to sit, and even large blocks of their conversation. But the very next morning, before 10 o'clock, there came a knock upon the Departmental door and he walked into her office, looking more matter-of-fact and business-like than she had ever seen him.