

## XXXII

*Second Meeting between a Citizen and the Great Pleasure-Dog Behemoth, involving Plans for Two New Homes.*

AND this time they did not have to go into the hall to talk.

No sooner had the opening door revealed the face of young Mr. Surface than Mr. Dayne, the kind-faced Secretary, reached hastily for his hat. In the same breath with his "Come in" and "Good-morning," he was heard to mention to the Assistant Secretary something about a little urgent business downtown.

Mr. Dayne acted so promptly that he met the visitor on the very threshold of the office. The clergyman held out his hand with a light in his manly gray eye.

"I'm sincerely glad to see you, Mr. Queed, to have the chance—"

"Surface, please."

Mr. Dayne gave his hand an extra wring. "Mr. Surface, you did a splendid thing. I'm glad of this chance to tell you so, and to beg your forgiveness for having done you a grave injustice in my thoughts."

The young man stared at him. "I have nothing to forgive you for, Mr. Dayne. In fact, I have no idea what you are talking about."

But Mr. Dayne did not enlighten him; in fact he was already walking briskly down the hall. Clearly the man had business that would not brook an instant's delay.

Hat in hand, the young man turned, plainly puzzled, and found himself looking at a white-faced little girl who gave back his look with brave steadiness.

"Do you think you can forgive me, too?" she asked in a very small voice.

He came three steps forward, into the middle of the room, and there halted dead, staring at her with a look of searching inquiry.

"I don't understand this," he said, in his controlled voice. "What are you talking about?"

"Mr. West," said Sharlee, "has told me all about it. About the reformatory. And I'm sorry."

There she stuck. Of all the speeches of prostrate yet somehow noble self-flagellation which in the night seasons she had so beautifully polished, not one single word could she now recall. Yet she continued to meet his gaze, for so should apologies be given though the skies fall; and she watched as one fascinated the blood slowly ebb from his close-set face.

"Under the circumstances," he said abruptly, "it was hardly a — a judicious thing to do. However, let us say no more about it."

He turned away from her, obviously unsteadied for all his even voice. And as he turned, his gaze, which had shifted only to get away from hers, was suddenly arrested and became fixed.

In the corner of the room, beside the bookcase holding the works of Conant, Willoughby, and Smathers, lay the great pleasure-dog Behemoth, leonine head sunk upon two massive outstretched paws. But Behemoth was not asleep; on the contrary he was overlooking the proceedings in the office with an air of intelligent and paternal interest.

Between Behemoth and young Henry Surface there passed a long look. The young man walked slowly across the room to where the creature lay, and, bending down, patted him on the head. He did it with indescribable awkwardness. Certainly Behemoth must have perceived what was so plain even to a human critic, that here was the first dog this man had ever patted in his life. Yet, being a pleasure-dog, he was wholly civil about it. In fact, after a lidless scrutiny unembarrassed by any recollections of his last meeting with this young man, he declared for friendship.



Gravely he lifted a behemothian paw, and gravely the young man shook it.

To Behemoth young Mr. Surface addressed the following remarks:—

"West was simply deceived—hoodwinked by men infinitely cleverer than he at that sort of thing. It was a manly thing—his coming to you now and telling you; much harder than never to—have made the mistake in the beginning. Of course—it wipes the slate clean. It makes everything all right now. You appreciate that."

Behemoth yawned.

The young man turned, and came a step or two forward, both face and voice under complete control again.

"I received a note from you this morning," he began briskly, "asking me to come in—"

The girl's voice interrupted him. Standing beside the little typewriter-table, exactly where her caller had surprised her, she had watched with a mortifying dumbness the second meeting between the pleasure-dog and the little Doctor that was. But now pride sprang to her aid, stinging her into speech. For it was an unendurable thing that she should thus tamely surrender to him the mastery of her situation, and suffer her own fault to be glossed over so ingloriously.

"Won't you let me tell you," she began hurriedly, "how sorry I am—how ashamed—that I misjudged—"

"No! No! I beg you to stop. There is not the smallest occasion for anything of that sort—"

"Don't you see my dreadful position? I suspect you, misjudge you—wrong you at every step—and all the time you are doing a thing so fine—so generous and splendid—that I am humiliated—to—"

Once again she saw that painful transformation in his face: a difficult dull-red flood sweeping over it, only to recede instantly, leaving him white from neck to brow.

"What is the use of talking in this way?" he asked peremptorily. "What is the good of it, I say? The matter is

over and done with. Everything is all right—his telling you wipes it all from the slate, just as I said. Don't you see that? Well, can't you dismiss the whole incident from your mind and forget that it ever happened?"

"I will try—if that is what you wish."

She turned away, utterly disappointed and disconcerted by his summary disposal of the burning topic over which she had planned such a long and satisfying discussion. He started to say something, checked himself, and said something entirely different.

"I have received your note," he began directly, "asking me to come in and see you about the matter of difference between the estates. That is why I have called. I trust that this means that you are going to be sensible and take your money."

"In a way—yes. I will tell you—what I have thought."

"Well, sit down to tell me, please. You look tired; not well at all. Not in the least. Take this comfortable chair."

Obediently she sat down in Mr. Dayne's high-backed swivel-chair, which, when she leaned back, let her neat-shod little feet swing clear of the floor. The chair was a happy thought; it steadied her; so did his unexampled solicitousness, which showed, she thought, that her emotion had not escaped him.

"I have decided that I would take it," said she, "with a—a—sort of condition."

Sitting in the chair placed for Mr. Dayne's callers, the young man showed instant signs of disapprobation.

"No, no! You are big enough to accept your own without conditions."

"Oh—you won't argue with me about that, will you? Perhaps it is unreasonable, but I could never be satisfied to take it—and spend it for myself. I could never have any pleasure in it—never feel that it was really mine. So," she hurried on, "I thought that it would be nice to take it—and give it away."

"Give it away!" he echoed, astonished and displeased.



"Yes — give it to the State. I thought I should like to give it to — establish a reformatory."

Their eyes met. Upon his candid face she could watch the subtler meanings of her idea slowly sinking into and taking hold of his consciousness.

"No — no!" came from him, explosively. "No! You must not think of such a thing."

"Yes — I have quite made up my mind. When the idea came to me it was like an inspiration. It seemed to me the perfect use to make of this money. Don't you see? . . . And —"

"No, I don't see," he said sharply. "Why will you persist in thinking that there is something peculiar and unclean about this money? — some imagined taint upon your title to it? Don't you understand that it is yours in precisely the same definite and honest way that the money this office pays you —"

"Oh — surely it is all a question of feeling. And if I feel —"

"It is a question of fact," said Mr. Surface. "Listen to me. Suppose your father had put this money away for you somewhere, so that you knew nothing about it, hidden it, say, in a secret drawer somewhere about your house" — did n't he know exactly the sort of places which fathers used to hide away money? — "and that now, after all these years, you had suddenly found it, together with a note from him saying that it was for you. You follow me perfectly? Well? Would it ever occur to you to give that money to the State — for a *reformatory*?"

"Oh — perhaps not. How can I tell? But that case would —"

"Would be exactly like this one," he finished for her crisply. "The sole difference is that it happens to be my father who hid the money away instead of yours."

There was a silence.

"I am sorry," said she, constrainedly, "that you take this — this view. I had hoped so much that you might agree

with me. Nevertheless, I think my mind is quite made up. I —"

"Then why on earth have you gone through the formality of consulting me, only to tell me —"

"Oh — because I thought it would be so nice if you would agree with me!"

"But I do not agree with you," he said, looking at her with frowning steadiness. "I do not. Nobody on earth would agree with you. Have you talked with your friends about this mad proposal? Have you —"

"None of them but you. I did not care to."

The little speech affected him beyond all expectation; in full flight as he was, it stopped him dead. He lost first the thread of his argument; then his steadiness of eye and manner; and when he spoke, it was to follow up, not his own thought, but her implication, with those evidences of embarrassment which he could never hide.

"So we are friends again," he stated, in rather a strained voice.

"If you are willing — to take me back."

He sat silent, drumming a tattoo on his chair-arm with long, strong fingers; and when he resumed his argument, it was with an entire absence of his usual air of authority.

"On every score, you ought to keep your money — to make yourself comfortable — to stop working — to bring yourself more pleasures, trips, whatever you want — all exactly as your father intended."

"Oh! — don't argue with me, please! I asked you not. I must either take it for that or not at all."

"It — it is not my part," he said reluctantly, "to dictate what you shall do with your own. I cannot sympathize in the least with your — your mad proposal. Not in the least. However, I must assume that you know your own mind. If it is quite made up —"

"Oh, it is! I have thought it all over so carefully — and with so much pleasure."

He rose decisively. "Very well, I will go to my lawyers



at once — this morning. They will arrange it as you wish."

"Oh — will you? How can I thank you? And oh," she added hastily, "there was — another point that I — I wished to speak to you about."

He gazed down at her, looking so small and sorrowful-eyed in her great chair, and all at once his knees ran to water, and the terrible fear clutched at him that his manhood would not last him out of the room. This was the reason, perhaps, that his voice was the little Doctor's at its brusquest as he said:—

"Well? What is it?"

"The question," she said nervously, "of a — a name for this reformatory that I want to found. I have thought a great deal about that. It is a — large part of my idea. And I have decided that my reformatory shall be called — that is, that I should like to call it — the Henry G. Surface Home."

He stared at her through a flash like a man stupefied; and then, wheeling abruptly, walked away from her to the windows which overlooked the park. For some time he stood there, back determinedly toward her, staring with great fixity at nothing. But when he returned to her, she had never seen his face so stern.

"You must be mad to suggest such a thing. Mad! Of course I shall not allow you to do it. I shall not give you the money for any such purpose."

"But if it is mine, as you wrote?" said Sharlee, looking up at him from the back of her big chair.

Her point manifestly was unanswerable. With characteristic swiftness, he abandoned it, and fell back to far stronger ground.

"Yes, the money is yours," he said stormily. "But that is all. My father's name is mine."

That silenced her, for the moment at least, and he swept rapidly on,

"I do not in the least approve of your giving your money

to establish a foundation at all. That, however, is a matter with which, unfortunately, I have nothing to do. But with my father's name I have everything to do. I shall not permit you to —"

"Surely — oh, surely, you will not refuse me so small a thing which would give me so much happiness."

"Happiness?" He flung the word back at her impatiently, but his intention of demolishing it was suddenly checked by a flashing remembrance of Fifi's definition of it. "Will you kindly explain how you would get happiness from that?"

"Oh — if you don't see, I am afraid I — could never explain —"

"It is a display of just the same sort of unthinking Quixotism which has led you hitherto to refuse to accept your own money. What you propose is utterly irrational in every way. Can you deny it? Can you defend your proposal by any reasonable argument? I cannot imagine how so — so mad an idea ever came into your mind."

She sat still, her fingers playing with the frayed edges of Mr. Dayne's blotting-pad, and allowed the silence to enfold them once more.

"Your foundation," he went on, with still further loss of motive power, "would — gain nothing by bearing the name of my father. He was not worthy. . . . No one knows that better than you. Will you tell me what impulse put it into your mind to — to do this?"

"I — had many reasons," said she, speaking with some difficulty. "I will tell you one. My father loved him once. I know he would like me to do something — to make the name honorable again."

"That," he said, in a hard voice, "is beyond your power."

She showed no disposition to contradict him, or even to maintain the conversation. Presently he went on:—

"I cannot let you injure your foundation by — branding it with his notoriety, in an impulsive and — and fruitless generosity. For it would be fruitless. You, of all people,



must understand that the burden on the other side is—impossibly heavy. You know that, don't you?"

She raised her head and looked at him.

Again, her pride had been plucking at her heartstrings, burning her with the remembrance that he, when he gave her everything that a man could give, had done it in a manner perfect and without flaw. And now she, with her infinitely smaller offering, sat tongue-tied and ineffectual, unable to give with a show of the purple, too poor-spirited even to yield him the truth for his truth which alone made the gift worth the offering.

Her blood, her spirit, and all her inheritance rallied at the call of her pride. She looked at him, and made her gaze be steady: though this seemed to her the hardest thing she had ever done in her life.

"I must not let you think that I — wanted to do this only for your father's sake. That would not be honest. Part of my pleasure in planning it — most of it, perhaps — was because I — I should so much like to do something for your father's son."

She rose, trying to give the movement a casual air, and went over to her little desk, pretending to busy herself straightening out the litter of papers upon it. From this safe distance, her back toward him, she forced herself to add:—

"This reformatory will take the place of the one you — would have won for us. Don't you see? Half — my happiness in giving it is gone, unless you will lend me the name."

Behind her the silence was impenetrable.

She stood at her desk, methodically sorting papers which she did not see, and wildly guessing at the meaning of that look of turbulent consciousness which she had seen break startled into his eyes. More even than in their last meeting, she had found that the sight of his face, wonderfully changed yet even more wonderfully the same, deeply affected her to-day. Its new sadness and premature age moved her strangely; with a peculiar stab of compassion and pain she

had perceived for the first time the gray in the nondescript hair about his temples. For his face, she had seen that the smooth sheath of satisfied self-absorption, which had once overlain it like the hard veneer on a table-top, had been scorched away as in a baptism by fire; from which all that was best in it had come out at once strengthened and chastened. And she thought that the shining quality of honesty in his face must be such as to strike strangers on the street.

And now, behind her on the office floor, she heard his footsteps, and in one breath was suddenly cold with the fear that her hour had come, and hot with the fear that it had not.

Engrossed with her papers, she moved so as to keep her back toward him; but he, with a directness which would not flinch even in this untried emergency, deliberately intruded himself between her and the table; and so once more they stood face to face.

"I don't understand you," he began, his manner at its quietest. "Why do you want to do this for me?"

At this close range, she glanced once at him and instantly looked away. His face was as white as paper; and when she saw that her heart first stopped beating, and then pounded off in a wild frightened pæan.

"I — cannot tell you — I don't know — exactly."

"What do you mean?"

She hardly recognized his voice; instinctively she began backing away.

"I don't think I — can explain. You — rather terrify me this morning."

"Are you in love with ME?" he demanded in a terrible voice, beginning at the wrong end, as he would be sure to do.

Finger at her lip, her blue eyes, bright with unshed tears, resting upon his in a gaze as direct as a child's, Sharlee nodded her head up and down.

And that was all the hint required by clever Mr. Surface, the famous social scientist. He advanced somehow, and



took her in his arms. On the whole, it was rather surprising how satisfactorily he did it, considering that she was the first woman he had ever touched in all his days.

So they stood through a time that might have been a minute and might have been an age, since all of them that mattered had soared away to the sunlit spaces where no time is. After awhile, driven by a strange fierce desire to see her face in the light of this new glory, he made a gentle effort to hold her off from him, but she clung to him, crying, "No, no! I don't want you to see me yet."

After another interval of uncertain length, she said:—

"All along my heart has cried out that you could n't have done that, and hurt me so. *You could n't*. I will never doubt my heart again. And you were so fine — so fine — to forgive me so easily."

In the midst of his dizzying exaltation, he marveled at the ease with which she spoke her inmost feeling; he, the great apostle of reason and self-mastery, was much slower in recovering lost voice and control. It was some time before he would trust himself to speak, and even then the voice that he used was not recognizable as his.

"So you are willing to do as much for my father's son as to — to — take his name for your own."

"No, this is something that I am doing for myself. Your father was not perfect, but he was the only father that ever had a son whose name I would take for mine."

A silence.

"We can keep my father's house," he said, in time, "for — for — us to live in. You must give up the office. And I will find light remunerative work, which will leave at least part of my time free for my book."

She gave a little laugh that was half a sob. "Perhaps — you could persuade that wealthy old lady — to get out a second edition of her *thesaurus*!"

"I wish I could, though!"

"You talk just like my little Doctor," she gasped — "my — own little Doctor. . . . I've got a little surprise for you

— about remunerative work," she went on, "only I can't tell you now, because it's a secret. Promise that you won't make me tell you."

He promised.

Suddenly, without knowing why, she began to cry, her cheek against his breast. "You've had a sad life, little Doctor — a sad life. But I am going to make it all up to you — if you will show me the way."

Presently she became aware that her telephone was ringing, and ringing as though it had been at it for some time.

"Oh bother! They won't let us have even a little minute together after all these years. I suppose you must let me go —"

She turned from the desk with the most beautiful smile he had ever seen upon a face.

"It's for you!"

"For me?" he echoed like a man in a dream. "That is — very strange."

Strange, indeed! Outside, the dull world was wagging on as before, unaware that there had taken place in this enchanted room the most momentous event in history.

He took the receiver from her with a left hand which trembled, and with his untrained right somehow caught and imprisoned both of hers. "Stand right by me," he begged hurriedly.

Now he hoisted the receiver in the general direction of his ear, and said in what he doubtless thought was quite a businesslike manner: "Well?"

"Mr. Queed? This is Mr. Hickok," said the incisive voice over the wire. "Well, what in the mischief are you doing up there?"

"I'm — I'm — transacting some important business — with the Department," said Mr. Surface, and gave Sharlee's hands a desperate squeeze. "But my —"

"Well, we're transacting some important business down here. Never should have found you but for Mr. Dayne's happening along. Did you know that West had resigned?"



"No, has he? But I started —"

"Peace to his ashes. De mortuis nil nisi bonum. The directors are meeting now to elect his successor. Only one name has been mentioned. There's only one editor we'll hear of for the paper. Won't you come back to us, my boy?"

The young man cleared his throat. "Come? I'd — think it a — a great honor — there's nothing I'd rather have. You are all too — too kind to me — I can't tell you — but —"

"Oh, no buts! But us no buts now! I'll go tell them —"

"No — wait," called the young man, hastily. "If I come, I don't come as Queed, you know. My name is Henry G. Surface. That may make a difference —"

"Come as Beelzebub!" said the old man, testily. "We've had enough of hiring a *name* for the *Post*. This time we're after a man, and by the Lord, we've got one!"

Henry Surface turned away from the telephone, struggling with less than his usual success to show an unmoved face.

"You — know?"

She nodded: in her blue-spar eyes, there was the look of a winged victory. "That was the little secret — don't you think it was a nice one? It is your magnificent boast come true. . . . And you don't even say 'I told you so'!"

He looked past her out into the park. Over the budding trees, already bursting and spreading their fans of green, far off over the jagged stretch of roofs, his gaze sought the battered gray *Post* building and the row of windows behind which he had so often sat and worked. A mist came before his eyes; the trees curveted and swam; and his visible world swung upside down and went out in a singing and spark-shot blackness.

She came to his side again: in silence slipped her hand into his; and following both his look and his thought, she felt her own eyes smart with a sudden bright dimness.

"This is the best city in the world," said Henry Surface. "The kindest people — the *kindest people* —"

"Yes, little Doctor."

He turned abruptly and caught her to him again; and now, hearing even above the hammering of his own blood the wild fluttering of her heart against his, his tongue unlocked and he began to speak his heart. It was not speech as he had always known speech. In all his wonderful array of terminology there were no words fitted to this undreamed need; he had to discover them somehow, by main strength make them up for himself; and they came out stammering, hard-wrung, bearing new upon their rough faces the mint-mark of his own heart. Perhaps she did not prize them any the less on that account.

"I'm glad that you love me that way — Henry. I must call you Henry now — must n't I, Henry?"

"Do you know," she said, after a time, "I am — *almost* weakening about giving our money for a Home. Somehow, I'd so like for you to have it, so that —"

She felt a little shiver run through him.

"No, no! I could not bear to touch it. We shall be far happier —"

"You could stop work, buy yourself comforts, pleasures, trips. It is a mad thing," she teased, "to give away money. . . . Oh, little Doctor — I can't breathe if you hold me — so tight."

"About the name," he said presently, "I — dislike to oppose you, but I cannot — I cannot —"

"Well, I've decided to change it, Henry, in deference to your wishes."

"I am extremely glad. I myself know a name —"

"Instead of calling it the Henry G. Surface Home —"

Suddenly she drew away from him, leaving behind both her hands for a keepsake, and raised to him a look so luminous and radiant that he felt himself awed before it, like one who with impious feet has blundered upon holy ground.



"I am going to call it the Henry G. Surface *Junior* Home. Do you know any name for a Home so pretty as that?"

"No, no, I — can't let you —"

But she cried him down passionately, saying: "Yes, that is *our* name now, and we are going to make it honorable."

From his place beside the sociological bookcase — perhaps faunal naturalists can tell us why — the great pleasure-dog Behemoth, whose presence they had both forgotten, raised his leonine head and gave a sharp, joyous bark.



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