

AT CROSS-PURPOSES.

(Continued.)

Stuyvesant was at a loss to account for Charley's early visit to his mother's house, where of late he had not been a frequent visitor at the best of times. Just now one would have supposed that he had enough to think of and to do, under present circumstances, without making morning calls. But Charley's conduct in this crisis had been systematically unaccountable. It was impossible to predict what he would do or say, what he would leave undone or unsaid.

The door opened, and Miss Vaughn entered. She looked very dainty and winsome in a fresh morning-gown; her eyes were dancing with happiness and health; and she had a bewitching smile on her lips. She tried to frown as Paul arose, but the smile was rebellious and would not down, so she gave up her vain assumption of displeasure and broke into a merry laugh.

"Well, Bear," she said, "have you come to apologize for your rudeness last night?"

This was just the reception Paul wished for. He was willing to apologize. Metaphorically speaking, he asked nothing better than to grovel at her little feet. All he was unwilling to do was to explain; and Kitty did not ask for an explanation.

He managed even to say, with a fair attempt at a light manner,—

"If you call me a bear, you must expect to be hugged."

"Hands off!" she cried, retreating behind a chair. "I haven't forgiven you yet for being cross."

"I throw myself on your mercy," he said, "and I beg you to believe that I was the greatest sufferer by not being on hand to walk home with you yesterday evening."

"Of course you were," she answered. "People who let their tempers get the best of them are always the greatest sufferers in the long run. But, now you have come back in a proper frame of mind, you shall be forgiven, and I'll let you take the kiss of peace."

And he took it at once. It seemed to refresh him.

"The fact is," she went on, "I have just heard something so interesting and so exciting that it has driven everything else out of my head, and it is impossible for me to bear malice. You shall guess what it is."

Paul could not guess. He had not the spirits for badinage, and, after one or two futile efforts under pressure of her insistence, he gave it up.

"Well, then," she said, "be prepared. Catch hold of something. Charley has been with me all morning, and he has made a full confession."

Kitty's recommendation to catch hold of something had not been unnecessary. Paul fairly reeled under her announcement. Charley had told her, and now, instead of Stuyvesant's finding her crushed and spirit-broken by the confession, she met him with a laugh on her lips and referred to it as something "exciting and interesting."

"He has told you all?" he gasped.

"Yes, everything. Isn't it just too lovely?"

Paul stared.

"It accounts for all that has been puzzling us in his ways of late."

It certainly did account for Charley's change of habits; but Stuyvesant could not share Miss Vaughn's satisfaction.

"You don't seem pleased," she said more coldly. "Perhaps you're jealous. Oh, I haven't forgotten how you raved about Gladys Tennant's beauty yesterday when you met her in the street-car,—though you pretended you didn't know her."

At any other time Paul would have asked no better pastime than to combat this pretty, unreasonable pique, but now all his faculties were absorbed in a boundless bewilderment. What Miss Tennant had to do with the matter he tried vainly to guess.

"Oh, yes, you look very innocent and unconscious," pursued Kitty. "But there, I am too happy; I can't be angry with you even when you deserve it. Why, you dear old stupid, when you met Gladys she was on her way to take the 3.30 train home to Yonkers. She had very good reason to suppose Charley might happen to be on the same train, and sure enough he was on it; and the whole thing was settled as they walked from the station to her house; and he dined and spent the evening at Mr. Tennant's in the character of—in what character, do you suppose?"

Paul could not hazard an opinion.

"How perversely stupid you are this morning!" she said, with a frown of impatience. "Haven't I told you as plainly as words could say it that Charley proposed to Gladys Tennant yesterday, and was accepted, and—What's the matter now?"

"Is that all Charley told you?" he asked.

"Yes, that is all; and a very sufficient piece of news it is, too, for a rainy morning, I should think," she retorted.

Paul breathed again. The fatal secret was still unsuspected by Kitty.

"You are not very profuse in your congratulations," she went on, after a moment's pause. Then she looked at him more closely. "What's the matter, Paul?" You look tired and troubled; you are not yourself this morning. Aren't you well, dear?"

There was a note of infinite tenderness and feeling in her voice, and Paul caught the hand that she passed caressingly over his brow and pressed it to his lips.

"There's nothing the matter with me," he said. "I had a rather disturbed night, that's all. Some—something's happened to worry me. Tell me, though: this engagement,—it is rather sudden, isn't it? I didn't know that Charley was paying attention in that quarter."

"Neither did I. None of us did," answered she. "The dear boy has been most preternaturally shy about it. You see, it seems he has been in

love quite a while. As far as I can make out, she took him into camp on the boat,—you know they came back from Europe on the same steamer last fall,—and he has been sinking deeper and deeper into love ever since, until now he is over head and ears. But he had an idea that Gladys was fond of some other fellow, and it has made him very miserable. He never hoped that anything would come of it, so he never told a soul a word about it. Finally he made up his mind that something had to be done in a hurry, so he took the plunge yesterday, and he found out that Gladys has been sighing for him as long as he has been dying for her, and now everything is lovely."

"I see," said Paul, slowly. He understood now the nature of the communication which Charley had intended to make to him that morning. He saw they had been at cross-purposes. He thought that the young artist had chosen a very inopportune moment for his wooing. The selfishness which Charley displayed in drawing a young girl's bright life into the shadow of his own struck Paul painfully. It was of a piece with the incomprehensible indifference and levity with which he had treated the whole transaction.

"Well, you are not very enthusiastic," said Kitty, after a pause.

"Of course I wish him all possible happiness," said Paul, with an effort, for the words seemed to stick in his throat.

"You shall say it to his face, then," said Miss Vaughn, running to the door. She was out in the hall in an instant, and calling with her clear, high-pitched voice:

"Charley, Charley,—come here a minute: I want you."

"Kitty, I beg of you——" Paul cried, springing to his feet.

But the summons had already gone forth. It was impossible to check this young lady in any course she had resolved on; and Paul had no possible excuse for his unwillingness to meet her brother. It was evident that Charley had told her nothing of their quarrel in the morning. Stuyvesant could only remain passive and let things take their course.

Presently Charley entered, light-hearted and lively as ever, without the trace of a care on his face. Paul, in his embarrassment, had withdrawn into the recess of the window.

"Well, Kit, what is it?" said the young fellow as he came in.

"Oh, I just called you down to receive Paul's congratulations: I've told him all about it—— Why, where is he?"

"Thanks, I'll take Stuyvesant's felicitations for granted," said Charley, coolly. "You see, they probably would not be exuberantly overflowing. He's been engaged long enough himself to have found out that it isn't a subject for unmixed congratulations!"

Kitty's quick eye detected something strained in the situation.

"What's the matter with you two?" she said. "Have you been quarrelling?"

Well, it's this way," said Charley. "Stuyvesant has just found out about the Mary Magdalen, and the manner in which I secured it seems to have jarred with his fine sense of honor."

Paul nearly fainted. So her brother had told Kitty the whole business, after all. There was nothing more to conceal. He came forward from the window, just as Kitty answered,—

"Well, you knew, Charley, I did not think it exactly *nice* myself."

Was the whole Vaughn family destitute of the moral sense? The girl he was engaged to referred to a felony as not "exactly nice!"

"That's a matter of opinion," said Charley, calmly.

Paul disagreed with him, but he said nothing.

"If a man chooses to hide away a masterpiece like that, the outside world must get at it as they can," the artist said.

Paul still remained silent.

"Well, there's something in that," said Kitty, appealing to him.

"Perhaps there is," said Stuyvesant, stiffly. "I can't see it myself. To take away Mr. Sargent's picture, without his knowledge, is in my eyes nothing more nor less than a theft."

"Since Mr. Sargent has been lucky enough to recover his 'Titian,' said Charley, "I think he will be charitable enough to find a milder word for my very petty larceny."

"Recovered his Titian?" cried Paul, in amazement. "How can that be?"

"By the exertions of the very intelligent and efficient police of the good city of Paris," answered Charley. "Haven't you read the papers yet? You were up early enough this morning."

"No; I have—I have been thinking of something else," said Paul, producing the *Gotham Gazette* from his pocket, still folded as he had taken it from his table.

Charley took the paper from him and opened it. "Read that," he said, indicating a paragraph in the cable news.

With growing amazement Paul read this despatch:

A PICTURE RESTORED—
TO ITS OWNER!

MR. SAN SARGENT RECOVERS HIS MARY MAGDALEN!

PARIS, January 3.—The Parisian police have done a bit of detective work worthy of the real Vidocq or the fabied Lecoq. They have caught the man who cut Mr. Sargent's Titian from its frame yesterday, and they have got back the picture itself. As I telegraphed you last night, they had a clue, and so adroitly did they follow it up that they laid hands on the thief within twelve hours after the robbery had been discovered. The theft was committed by a single man, an employee of the low curiosity-shop where the picture was discovered two years ago. He bribed the concierge of Mr. Sargent's apartments yesterday morning, and the painting was cut from its frame only an hour or two before the owner returned. The rascal has made a full confession, in which he acknowledges that his motive was to hold the Mary Magdalen to ransom and to strike the American owner for a hundred