

naturally he was good to his little cousin; he was good to everybody, and now that Pauline was grown up and begun to go to places, his devotion took a brotherly form. Of course he was poor, and if sensible would marry rich. He had been going about for an age in "that other set." He knew the Briggs girls and the Snowe girls, and all the parvenu people who had been ruling at assemblies and dancing-classes during the dark interregnum. Perhaps he would marry a Briggs or a Snowe. If he did it would be quite proper. He was Courtlandt Beekman, and his name would sanctify nearly any sort of Philistine bride. But no one ever dreamed of suspecting that he might want to marry the cousin, twelve years his junior, who had sat on his knee as a school girl, munching the candies he used to bring her and often pelting him with childish raileries at the same ungrateful moment.

In person Courtlandt was by no means prepossessing. He had a tall, brawny figure, and a long, sallow face, whose unclassic irregularities might have seemed dull and heavy but for the brown eyes, lucid and variant, that enlivened it. He was a man of few words; but his silences, though some times important, were never awkward. No one accused him of stupidity, but no one had often connected him with the idea of cleverness. He produced the impression of being a very close observer, you scarcely knew why. Possibly it was because you felt confident that his silences were not mentally vacuous. He had gone among the gay throngs almost since boyhood; if he had not so persistently mingled with ladies (and in the main very sweet and cultured ones, notwithstanding the denunciatory dogmas of the "new set") it is probable that he would continuously have merited the title of ungainly and graceless. But ease and polish had come to him unavoidably; he was like some rough-shapen vessel that has fallen into the hands of the gilder and decorator. It would have been hard to pick a flaw in his manners, and yet his manners were the last thing that he made you think about. He was in constant social demand; his host and hostesses forgot how valuable to them he really was; he almost stood for that human miracle, a man without enemies. He made a kind of becoming background for nearly everybody; he had no axe to grind, no ladder to climb, no prize to win; he stood neither as debtor nor creditor toward society; he was, in a way, society itself. There were very few women who did not enjoy a chat with him *à deux*, and in all general conversation, though his attitude was chiefly that of listener, the talkers themselves were unaware how often they sought the response of his peculiar, serious smile, or the intelligent gleam of his look.

Pauline had not been greatly troubled, on her advent among the merry-makers, with that timidity which is so keen a distress to so many callow maids. Bashfulness was not one of her weak points; she had borne the complex stare levelled at her in drawing-rooms with excellent *aplomb*. Still, she could not help feeling that her kinsman, Courtlandt, had comfortably smoothed her path toward an individual and secure foothold. Those early intervals, dire to the soul of every novice like herself, when male adherence and escort failed through meagreness of acquaintanceship, Courtlandt had filled with the supporting relief of his presence and his attentions. There had been no *mauvais quart d'heure* in Pauline's evenings; her cousin had loyally saved her from even the momentary chagrin of being left without a courtier. Later on, his kindly vigilance had become needless; but he was always to be trusted, nevertheless, as a safeguard against possible desertion. The occasion on which Mr. Hamilton Varick first saw Pauline, was at a ball given in the February of her first season, two full months after she had modestly emerged with her little sisterhood of rosebud damsels. It was a very beautiful ball, given in a stately and lovely house adjacent to the Park, and by a lady now old and wrinkled, who had held her own forty years ago as a star in our then limited firmament of fashion. The dancers, among whom was her fair and smiling grand-daughter of eighteen, chased the jolly hours in a spacious apartment, brilliant with prismatic candelabra, and a lustrous floor of waxed wood. The rosy-and-white frescoes on the ceiling, the silver-fretted delicacy of frieze and cornice, the light, pure blues and pinks of tapestries, the airy and buoyant effects in tint and symmetry, made the whole quick-moving throng of revellers appear as if the past had let them live again out of some long-vanished French court-festival.

"These young people only need powdered heads to make it look as if Louis Quinze were entertaining us in dead earnest," said Mr. Varick, with his high-keyed, nonchalant voice. He addressed an elderly matron as he spoke, but he gave a covert glance at Pauline, to whom he had just requested and received the honor of a presentation.

"I think it would be in very dead earnest if he did," said Pauline, speaking up with a gay laugh; and Mr. Varick laughed, too, relishing her pert joke. He paid her some gallant compliments as he stood at her side, though she thought them stiff and antique in sound, notwithstanding the

foreign word or phrase that was so apt to tinge them. She found Mr. Varick pleasantest when he was asking after her sick mother, and telling her what New York gaieties used to be before the beginning of his long European absence. He had a tripping, lightsome mode of speech, that somehow suited the jaunty upward sweep of his white mustache. He would oscillate both hands in a graceful style, as he talked. Elegant superficiality flowed from him without an effort. It needed no keenness to tell that he had been floating buoyantly on the top crest of the wave, and well amid its froth, all his life. He made no pretense to youth; he would, indeed, poke fun at his own seniority, with a relentless and breezy sort of melancholy.

"Did you ever hear of a French poet named François Villon," he said to Pauline, dropping into a seat at her side that some departure had just left vacant. "No, I dare say you've not. He was a dreadful chap—a kind of *polisson*, as we say, but he wrote the most charming ballads; I believe he was hung afterward, or ought to have been—I forget which. One of his songs had a sad little *refrain* that ran thus: '*Ou sont les neiges d'autan?*'—'Where are the sorrows of last year?' you know. Well, mademoiselle—no, Miss Pauline, I mean—that line runs in my head to-night. *Ça me gêne*—it bothers me. I want to have the good things of youth back again. I come home to New York, and find my snow all melted. Everything is changed. I feel like a ghost—a merry old ghost, however. *Tenez*—just wait a bit. Do you think those nice young gentlemen will have anything to say to you after they have seen you a little longer in my company? I'm sure I have frightened four or five of them away. They're asking each other, now, who is that old *épouvantail*—what is the word?—scarecrow. Ah! *voilà*—here comes one much bolder than the rest. I will have mercy on him—and retire. But before my *départ* I have a favour to request of you. You will give mamma my compliments? You will tell her that I shall do myself the honour of calling upon her? Thanks, very much. We shall be ghosts together, poor mamma and I; you need not be *chez vous* when I call, unless you are quite willing—that is, if you are afraid of ghosts."

"Oh, I'm not," laughed Pauline. "I don't believe in them, Mr. Varick."

"That is delightful for you to say!" her companion exclaimed. "It means that you will listen for a little while to our spectral conversation and not find it too *ennuyeuse*. How very kind of you! Ah! we old fellows are sometimes very grateful for a few crumbs of kindness!"

"You can have a whole loaf from me, if you want," said Pauline, with an air of girlish diversion.

Not long afterward she declared to her cousin, Courtlandt: "I like the old gentleman ever so much, Court. He's a refreshing change. You New York men are all cut after the same pattern."

"I'm afraid he's cut with a rather crooked scissors," said Courtlandt, who indulged a sly epigram oftener than he got either credit or discredit for doing.

"Oh," said Pauline, as if slowly understanding. "You mean he is French, I suppose."

"Quite French, they report."

Mr. Varick made his promised visit upon Pauline and her mother sooner than either of them expected. Mrs. Van Corlear was rather more ill than usual, on the day he appeared, and almost the full burden of the ensuing conversation fell upon her daughter.

The next evening, at the opera, he dropped into a certain box where Pauline was seated with her aunt, Mrs. Poughkeepsie. On the following day Pauline received, anonymously, an immense basket of exquisite flowers. Twice again Mr. Varick called upon her mother, in the charmless upstairs sitting-room of their boarding-house. As it chanced, Pauline was not at home either time.

An evening or two afterwards she returned at about eleven o'clock from a theatre-party, to find that her mother had not yet retired. Mrs. Van Corlear's usual bed-time was a very exact ten o'clock.

The mother and daughter talked for a little while together, in low tones. When Pauline went into her own chamber, that night, her face was pale and her heart was beating.

At a great afternoon reception which took place two days later, Courtlandt, who made his appearance after five o'clock, coming up-town from the Law-office in which he managed by hard work to clear a yearly two thousand dollars or so, said to his cousin, with a sharpened and rather inquisitive look:

"What's the matter? You don't seem to be in good spirits."

Pauline looked at him steadily, for a moment. It was a great crush, and people were babbling all about them. "There's something I want to speak of," the girl presently said, in a lingering way.