

contradiction. "Miss Cora, the youngest daughter of Mrs. Dares, told me last night that she and her mother would both be very glad to have you come."

There was a momentary intonation in Kindelon's voice that struck his listener as oddly unexpected. "So you have already spoken of me?" she said, lingeringly, and looking at him with more intentness than she herself knew of.

"Yes," he replied, with a certain speed, and with tones that were not just set in an unembarrassed key. "I go there, now and then."

"And you have mentioned me to Mrs. Dares?"

"Yes... more than once, I think. She knows that you may be induced to come this evening."

His glance, usually so direct, had managed to avoid Pauline's which was just then very direct indeed.

"Tell me," Pauline said, after another silence had somehow made itself felt between them. "Are you very good friends with this girl... Miss Cora?"

He returned her look, then, but with an unwonted vacillation of his own—or so she chose to think.

"Yes," he responded, fluently frank, as it seemed. "We are very good friends—excellent friends, I may say. You will find her quite as charming, in a different way, as her mother. I mean, of course, if you will go with me this evening—or any future evening."

Pauline put forth her hand, and laid it for an instant on his full-moulded arm.

"I will go with you this evening," she said, softly.

## V.

KINDELON found Pauline in a very lightsome and animated state of mind when he called at her house that evening. She had a touch of positive excitement in her way of referring to the proposed visit. He thought he had never seen her look more attractive than when she received him, already wrapped in a fleecy white over-garment and drawing on her gloves, while a piquant smile played at the corners of her mouth and a vivacious glitter filled her gray eyes.

"You are here before the carriage," she said to him, "though we shan't have to wait long for that... Hark—there is the bell, now; my men would not presume to be a minute late this evening. The footman must have detected in my manner a great seriousness when I gave him my order; I felt very serious, I can assure you, as I did so. It meant the first step in a totally new career."

"Upon my word, you look fluttered," said Kindelon, in his mellow, jocose voice.

"Naturally I do!" exclaimed Pauline, as she nodded to the servant who now announced that the carriage was in readiness. "I am going to have a fresh, genuine sensation. I am going to emancipate myself—to break my tether, as it were. I've been a prisoner for life; I don't know how the sunshine looks, or how it feels to take a gulp of good, free air."

He watched her puzzledly until the outer darkness obscured her face, and they entered the carriage together. She mystified him while she talked on, buoyantly enough, yet always in the same key. He was not sure whether or no her sparkling manner had a certain sincere trepidation behind it. Now and then it seemed to him as if her voluble professions of anxiety rang false—as if she were making sport of herself, of him, or of the projected diversion.

"Do you really take the whole matter so much to heart," he presently said, while the vehicle rolled them along the wintry, lamplit streets, "or is this only some bit of dainty and graceful masquerading?"

"Masquerading?" she echoed, with a shocked accent.

"Oh, well, you are accustomed to meeting all sorts of people. You can't think that any human classes are so sharply divided that to cross a new threshold means to enter a new world."

She was silent, and he could see her face only vaguely for some little time; but when a passing light cast an evanescent gleam upon it he thought that he detected something like a look of delicate mischief there. Her next words, rather promptly spoken, bore with them an explanatory bluntness.

"I am convinced that if everybody else disappoints me Miss Dares will not."

"Miss Dares?" he almost faltered, in the tone of one thrown off his guard. "Miss Cora Dares," Pauline continued, with a self-correcting precision. "The younger of the two daughters, the one who paints. Oh, you see," she continued, after a little laugh that was merry though faint, "I have forgotten nothing. I've a great curiosity to see this young artist."

You had not half so much to tell me about her as about her mother, and yet you have somehow contrived to make her quite as interesting."

"Why?" Kindelon asked, with a soft abruptness to which the fact of his almost invisible face lent a greater force. "Is it because you think that I like Cora Dares? I should like to think that was your reason for being interested in her."

Another brief silence on Pauline's part followed his words, and then she suddenly responded, with the most non-committal innocence of tone:

"Why, what other reason could I possibly have? Of course I suppose that you like her. And of course that is why I am anxious to meet her."

There was a repelling pleasantness in these three short sentences. If Kindelon had been inclined to slip any further into the realm of sentiment, the very reverse of encouragement had now met him. Pauline's matter-of-course complacency had a distinct chill under its superficial warmth. "Don't misunderstand me, please," she went on, with so altered a voice that her listener felt as if she had indeed been masquerading through some caprice best known to herself, and now chose once and for all to drop masque and cloak. "I really expect a most novel and entertaining experience to-night. You say that I have met all sorts of people. I have by no means done so. It strikes me that our acquaintance is not young enough for me to tell you this. It is true that I made a few pleasant and even valuable friendships in Europe; but these have been exceptional in my life, and I now return to my native city to disapprove everybody whom I once approved."

"And you expect to approve all the people whom you shall meet to-night?"

"You ask that in a tone of positive alarm."

"I can't help betraying some nervous fear. Your expectations are so exorbitant."

Pauline tossed her head in the dimness. "Oh, you will find me more easily suited than you suppose."

Kindelon gave a kind of dubious laugh. "I'm not so sure that you will be easily suited," he said. "You are very pessimistic in your judgments of the fashionable throng. It strikes me that you are a rigid critic of nearly everybody. How can I tell that you will not denounce me, in an hour or so, as the worst of impostors, for having presumed to introduce you among a lot of objectionable bores?"

"I think you will admit," said Pauline, in offended reply, "that most of Mrs. Dare's friends have brains."

"Brains? Oh, yes, all sorts of brains."

"That is just what I want to meet," she rapidly exclaimed—"all sorts of brains. I am accustomed, at present, to only two or three sorts... Oh, you need not be afraid that I shall become bored. No, indeed! On the contrary, I expect to be exhilarated. I shall fraternize with most of them—I shall be one of them almost immediately. Wait until you see!"

"I shan't see that," said Kindelon, with an amused *brusquerie*.

"What do you mean?" she questioned, once more offensively.

He began to speak, with his old glib fleetness. "Why, my dear lady, because you are *not* one of them, and never can be. You are a patrician, reared differently, and you will carry your stamp with you wherever you go. Your very voice will betray you in ten seconds. You may show them that you want to be their good friend, but you can't convince them that you and they are of the same stock. Some of them will envy you, others may secretly presume to despise you, and still others may very cordially like you. I don't think that it has ever dawned upon me until lately how different you are from these persons whom you wish to make your allies and supporters. That night, when I went into your aunt's opera-box, I had a very slight understanding of the matter. I've always scoffed at the idea of a New York aristocracy. It seemed so absurd, so self-contradictory. And if it existed at all, I've always told myself, it must be the merest nonsensical sham. But now I begin to recognize it as an undeniable fact. There's a sort of irony, too, in my finding it out so late—after I have knocked about as a journalist in a city which I believed to be democratic if it was anything. However, you've made the whole matter plain to me. You didn't intend to open my plebeian eyes, but you have done so. It is really wonderful how you have set me thinking. I've often told myself that America was a political failure as a republic, but I never realized that it was a social one."

Just then the carriage stopped. "I am sorry," said Pauline, "to have unconsciously made you think ill of the literary society of New York." She paused for a moment, and there was a rebuking solemnity in her voice as she added: "I believe—I insist upon believing till I see otherwise—that it does not deserve to be condemned."

(TO BE CONTINUED).