

THE CONSPIRING WALL.

BY SILAS K. HOOKING.

Author of "God's Outcast," "In Spite of Fate," "A Day's Price," "For Such is Life," "The Son of Man," "For Life and Liberty," "A Son of Reuben," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.—Basil Pendarvis, a clever young artist, who finds it easier to get his picture praised than bought, receives a commission to paint the portrait of Dorothy Cleveland, at the father's request at Sandhurst, Kent. He accepts the more readily as cash is very scarce with him at the time. Basil finds himself hospitably welcomed, as indeed, his friend, Phil Duncan, who is a neighbor of Cleveland's, assures him he would be. Basil is charmed by his sister, who is a girl not only of great beauty but of a more than ordinary mind. Her sister Elizabeth strikes him less favorably. She is a professed invalid, with the picture in which Basil goes back to his studio in London. He now finds himself hopelessly in love with Dorothy, and the thought of her, in which his "My Lady Beautiful," in Dorothy, lends tell him he reaches greatness.

CHAPTER VII. The Dream of Youth.

It is the privilege of a few men in every generation to awaken some morning to the discovery that they have become famous. Basil Pendarvis happened to be one of them. His fame might not be of any wide or enduring order; but for the moment, and in the little world that interests itself in art, he had come unmistakably to the front. His picture had won almost instantaneous recognition, and in a few days was the talk of society and the clubs.

At first he found it difficult to realize that he and Basil Pendarvis whom people were talking about, were one and the same individual. For a while he seemed to stand apart from himself—to contemplate with curious interest this other individual who bore his name and wore his clothes. It was not until he stood in the crowd before his picture and listened to the remarks that were made that he was able to identify himself with the new genius that had arisen in the world of art.

The sensation was a very curious one, and not at all like he imagined it might be. He had dreamt of becoming famous, the most men have done. He had fancied the thrills of ecstasy that would run through his veins when his name was proclaimed from the house-tops; he had imagined the lordly air with which he would walk through the crowded galleries. The reality was entirely different. He felt humbled and chastened. He wanted to hide from people, he dreaded recognition; and when his friends congratulated him he felt uncomfortable and wished they would talk about something else. Neither was it a pleasant experience to find that people who had treated him with scant courtesy in other days were now intensely complimentary in their manner. However differently he might appear in the eyes of others, he was the same in his own eyes; hence the more suggestion he felt of the man who had been obliged to a superior order—that he was something different from what he was a month before.

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pretation thereof. It was "over facing," his appearance would have said, to be credited with so many things which he had never intended. He was quite sure that he deserved infinitely more praise than he deserved. For directly a few of the leading journals and critics began to praise his picture, all the smaller fry rushed to outdo the other in the lavishness of his eulogy.

Basil was very much afraid that the thing would be overdone and that there would come a reaction of feeling. He had heard of people going up like a rocket and coming down like a stick; and he began to fear that that might be his fate. Better, he thought, to remain in obscurity than to be brought down to a moment like a meteor and then vanish into impenetrable and everlasting darkness.

In his quieter moments and when alone in his own studio, he thought mostly of Dodo. Basil is charmed by his sister, who is a girl not only of great beauty but of a more than ordinary mind. Her sister Elizabeth strikes him less favorably. She is a professed invalid, with the picture in which Basil goes back to his studio in London. He now finds himself hopelessly in love with Dorothy, and the thought of her, in which his "My Lady Beautiful," in Dorothy, lends tell him he reaches greatness.

He began to fear after a while that the Cleverlands were neither interested in him nor in his success. He had never heard from them either directly or indirectly since he left Sandhurst. Judging by outward appearances, he had passed completely out of their thoughts. If Mr. Cleveland had come up to town he had never called to see him, had shown no desire to renew the acquaintance. Perhaps he regarded him simply as a journeyman painter who, having been paid for his work, deserved no further recognition.

But what of Dorothy? They had been so much together, they had opened their hearts to each other, they had discussed all sorts of questions with such undisguised sympathy and friendliness that he could not conceive that she would ever feel as a stranger towards him. She had been warmly and kindly again, not as chance acquaintances but as friends. At any rate, he was resolved that some day he would seek her out and tell her all the truth. If she spurned him, then he would know the worst; and that certainly, however painful, was better than a life tormented by alternate hopes and fears.

He was leaving the Academy one morning feeling quite desolate. The crowd that stood around his picture no longer gave him pleasure. The one person he wanted to see never came. He had passed through the turmoil and was descending the steps when he came face to face with Dodo and her father.

Peter Cleveland was the first to speak. "Delighted to see you, Mr. Pendarvis," he said. "We have come up to town on purpose to see your picture. Dodo would give me no rest until I brought her to see it. She has been worrying my life out for the last fortnight; so in sheer self-defence I have had to bring her up."

"It is very kind of you, I am sure," Basil answered with a smile, while he shook hands first with Dorothy and then with her father. "We are all delighted to hear of your success," Dodo said in her most charming manner. "Thank you very much," he replied. "I hope you will like the picture."

"We shall have no difficulty in finding it," Dodo said. "I suppose?" Mr. Cleveland inquired. "I think not," Basil said, diffidently. "But if you don't mind, I will turn back with you."

"Oh, please do," Dodo said, looking frankly up into his eyes. "It is so much pleasanter to go through the galleries with someone who understands pictures." "I shall be delighted to assist you in any way possible," Basil said, and he turned and walked up the stairs by Dodo's side.

"I am sorry I can spare only an hour at the outside," Mr. Cleveland said. "If I leave my daughter behind, perhaps you will not mind seeing her back to the hotel?" "My time is quite at her disposal," Basil answered, with a sudden throb of his heart. "Indeed I have nothing I am compelled to do to-day."

"Well, it is fortunate that we met," Mr. Cleveland said, beaming all over his face. "By the way, I intended looking you up to-morrow." "You must do that in any case," Basil answered. "I should feel very much disappointed if you went back without calling upon me."

"Well, call us to your picture right away," Mr. Cleveland said; "I want to have a good look at that first." "It took them some considerable time before they could get a good look at the picture, so many others were before them, but after a while the crowd moved on and the three were able to stand directly in front of it. For a while neither Mr. Cleveland nor Dorothy spoke a word, then the former shifted his position somewhat and looked first at the picture and then at Dodo. An idea had evidently struck him and Basil watched him with curious interest. After a few minutes Mr. Cleveland stepped behind Dorothy and came up to Basil.

"By the way," he whispered, "you did not intend that to be a likeness, I presume?" "Well, no, not exactly," Basil said, hesitatingly; "that is, not a likeness in the true sense of the word." "But it is Dodo to a dot," said Mr. Cleveland.

"It is something like her, I grant," Basil answered. "You see, I had been busy painting her portrait just before I commenced this drawing, and so naturally her features would be fresh in my memory." "Well, yes, I suppose so, but I am sure this is a portrait that she never expected. Dodo, however, did not appear to notice the likeness, nor did she heed the whispered conversation that went on between her and Basil. He was talking with Mr. Cleveland watching her face with great interest and curiosity.

"Oh, Mr. Pendarvis," she said at length. "I think it is lovely." "I am glad you are pleased," he whispered. "It is a far nobler picture than I expected to see. Excuse me for saying

that but—but—oh! it is very difficult to put into words what one means." "Don't you feel greatly flattered?" her father questioned.

"Flattered?" she said. "I do not understand." "Why, haven't you eyes?" he blurted out. "Don't you see?" "I see the picture," she replied, "and I think it is noble and lovely."

"Yes, yes, but don't you see that he has painted you?" he said. "For a moment she knitted her brow and looked astonished. "That's got you to the very dot. You are the Lady Beautiful!" "Oh, no, no!" she said. "It is not anything like me. Is it now, Mr. Pendarvis? You never thought of me when you were painting it, did you?"

Basil was taken off his guard and for a moment did not know what reply to make. Then he looked at her frankly and said: "Well, Miss Dorothy, to say that I never thought of you while painting the picture would not be true. Indeed, I thought of you often, and if I must be frank your face was constantly before me while I was painting, and so even without intention some shade of resemblance was bound to come into the picture."

She looked up into his face for a moment and then her eyes fell. The same question suggested itself to her as when she first contemplated her own finished portrait. The artist in each case had idealized her. Why had he done so? How could he see that he credited her with charms that she felt quite sure she did not possess? What was the meaning of it? Was this picture a parable, also, a revelation of himself? Did he mean to convey to her some truth that others could not read? and a warm blush stole over her face.

They passed on at length to look at other pictures, Basil pointing out the

talked about," she answered. "Aye, that is because I was an unknown artist. Men have praised me not because of what the picture is in itself merely, but because they think it has the promise of something better in the future."

"Ah, yes," he said, with sparkling eyes. "You will do something even greater than this?" "I hope I may," he answered, speaking almost in a whisper. "If I can always have the same inspiration."

For a moment she glanced shyly up into his eyes, and then they walked away to another part of the room. Now, as everyone knows, there is nothing more to be said than looking at pictures, so after a while they found an empty seat and sat down side by side. The rooms were gradually thinning for people were going off to their lunch.

For awhile they talked of ordinary commonplace things—about the weather, about the plays that were running at the theatres, about forthcoming concerts, about the prospects of the season. Then he made sympathetic inquiries about Elizabeth, and discovered that her health was no better, that indeed, she required even more attention than before, and all the while he was longing to tell her what was uppermost in his mind and heart; but this was neither the time nor the place. He must wait for some other opportunity. So when they had exhausted the ordinary stock of conversational subjects they went off into the lunch-room and had lunch together.

"Shall you remain in London long?" he questioned, jarring her soul. "I want to remain two or three weeks at father will let me," she said. "Is he likely to prevent you?" he questioned. "Well, if he had only himself to consider he would let me stay as long as I liked, but you see there is always Elizabeth in the background, and father has to consider her, and I have to consider

Basil felt hot at the door and walked away feeling almost like a man in a dream. It had been a wonderful day to him—a day of revelation, a day of renewed hope, of enlarged vision, of fresh resolution.

"If you win Dodo," he said to himself as he walked across Trafalgar square, "I can win the world. If she will only stand by my side I will fear nothing. If she will inspire me I can accomplish great things."

When he got back to his studio he threw himself into an easy chair and lit a cigar, and in the blue wreath of smoke that curled above his head he saw Dorothy's face come and go. She smiled at him and then vanished, came back and looked at him again, and again disappeared.

"With my love's life," he whispered. "With you all things are possible. Loving you I am great." The dynamic force and power of a pure, overmastering love he had realized before. He felt it all the time he was painting his picture; but never did he realize it so fully as now. Loving Dorothy seemed to call into play all that was best and most worthy in his nature, his love seemed to torch and awaken the latent greatness of his life; to subdue all that was base and unworthy, and to transmute and energize every power and every passion that made for right and truth.

CHAPTER VIII. The Heart's Desire. Two days later Basil's impatience got the better of him. He had resolved to proceed with great caution, to carefully prepare the way before him, to make sure of his ground before taking any decisive step. Alas! such resolutions often break down at the last moment. It was so in Basil's case.

He was walking along the Embankment gardens, his eyes upon the ground, his thoughts intent upon Dorothy, when he became conscious that someone had

London streets." "But I thought you did not like London?" "Years ago when we lived in Pimlico I hated it; but I was only a girl then."

"And do you think you would like it now?" "I'm sure I should—that is, for the greater part of the year." "Perhaps your father will take a house here again some day."

"You don't know. You see, Elizabeth vows she will never put foot in London again." Basil was on the point of saying that that might be an advantage, but thought better of it, and so silence fell for several minutes.

Dorothy was the first to break it. "I went yesterday to have another look at your picture," she said, without raising her eyes, "and I liked it even better than at the first."

"I am so glad." "I was so interested in the faces of the poor people. What a variety of types you have!" "Yes, I had some difficulty in getting models."

"I cannot think how you imagined it all." "It was not all imagination," he answered, quickly. "I had seen you as the Lady Beautiful at Sandhurst."

"Oh, no, not like that. You cannot compare a glow-worm with the sun." "At that moment he was silent; then he said, quickly, "The picture is more yours than mine."

She started a startled glance at him and said, hurriedly: "I cannot at all imagine what you mean." "But for you it would never have been painted," he said, in the same low tone. "You were its inspiration. It grew out of my love for you."

She drew away from him suddenly and shifted her parasol, but did not speak. His face was very pale, his heart was throbbing wildly, in all other respects he seemed quite calm and self-possessed. "I did not mean to say this to you now," he went on, "but my resolution has broken down. Please do not be angry with me but bear me to the end."

He saw that she was trembling, but her eyes were turned away from him. "Perhaps you will think me guilty of great presumption, but I could not help loving you. To be with you day after day and week after week and not love you was impossible. All unconsciously you filled my life and dominated my will. I saw everything through the light and sunshine of your presence. Loving you called into play new thoughts and new ideas. It awoke a new power within me. I did nothing worthy to be remembered till love lived in my heart. O Dorothy, it was to win you that I painted the picture."

She turned upon him suddenly with big eyes and trembling lips. "Do you love me still?" she questioned. "Love you still?" he said, looking at her with a great yearning in his eyes. "Love you still? I love, then, a passion, the mood, the passion of a moment? O Dorothy, I shall love you for ever and ever."

She came closer to him and hid her hand in his. "And you are not angry?" he whispered with a smile. "Angry? I'm the happiest girl in all London to-day."

He wanted to take her in his arms and kiss her, but people were passing to and fro and up and down all the time. For a moment he wondered whether any other man ever made love under the same circumstances, and a smile played round the corners of his mouth, as he was tantalizing that he could not even seal his love with a kiss. He could only look at her and whisper: "My darling."

And for answer she looked at him, and in her eyes he read all that she would have said. "Ever since I left Sandhurst," he said. "I have lived for this hour and for this only."

"Then you were not afraid that I might say 'No'?" she questioned, glancing shyly at him. "Yes, I have been dreadfully afraid, but I never lost hope altogether. I thought if I could only make some kind of name for myself I might dare to approach you."

"And if your picture had not been a success you would not have told me?" "I do not know, darling. Love makes us heroes sometimes and sometimes cowards. But think of the presumption of talking about love when one is barely able to maintain oneself!"

"I did, Dodo; you stole my heart unawares." "And you do not think I care for you simply because you have made a name?" "No, sweetheart, I don't," he answered, candidly. "Of course, your success has made me very proud of you. But do you remember how when I got tired of sitting we used to take long walks across the park together?"

"As if I could ever forget!" he replied. "I used to wonder then if I could read your eyes aright." "And did you care for me then?" he questioned. "Too much, I fear. But you compelled me to think about you." "In what way, my darling?" "In many ways. You idealized my portrait and that made me wonder. "Idealized it?" "Of course you did. Between ourselves that portrait is an awful fraud. You endowed me with charms that I never have possessed and never shall."

I am so proud and so happy. I hope I am not too happy. I hope the joy is not too sweet to last." "We will not anticipate trouble, darling. I do not see why we should. Let's be happy while we can."

"Are you happy, Basil?" "Well, to tell the truth, sweetheart, I'm very miserable just now." "Miserable?" she questioned in surprise. "It is of no use denying it," he said with a laugh. "But I'm dying to kiss you, and there isn't an opportunity."

"O Basil!" and a blush, soft and sweet as the dawn, stole over her face. "London is just hateful," he said, still smiling. "If we were only at Sandhurst with the quiet country all around us."

"You know you do not like the country," she said, rising to her feet and casting a mischievous glance at him. "But wonder what time it is."

"Never mind the time," he said. "Let us walk towards Westminster. There are gardens again beyond the railway bridge."

His own stern father will have got back by this time and he will wonder what has become of me." "He will not think that you are lost, and, oh, Dodo, I don't know when I may have you to myself again."

So they walked away together and were conscious of nothing but the presence of each other. They did not hear the roar and shriek of railway trains overhead and scarcely heeded the strings of reds rolling down Northumberland avenue towards the Embankment. In a few minutes they were in the gardens again with the noise of traffic sounding faint and far away.

"O Dorothy!" he said, "it seems too good to be true. To have won my heart's desire so soon, to have had no opposition."

"Ah!" she interrupted, with a bright smile. "I ought to have kept you at a distance. I fear I have not been at all diplomatic. They say people do not prize what they win so easily."

"Nothing that I might endure for your sake, darling, could make me prize you more," he answered. "I hope you will never have to suffer anything unpleasant on my account," she said, slowly and thoughtfully.

"If I had to suffer for you, darling, and I knew that by suffering I did you good, then even pain would be a pleasure. Oh! I do not think you can ever guess how much I love you."

"And you have been loving me all these months in silence?" "You have scarcely ever been absent from my thoughts waking or dreaming."

"I wonder if you can speak to soul across the gulf of time and space?" "Why do you wonder, Dodo?" "Because you have so often come to me in my dreams and even when I have been wide awake. I have started times after time fancying I heard you speak."

"Did you ever expect I should come in reality?" "I sometimes wondered if you would. The winter seemed such a long one, and all the time the weather left directly you took your departure."

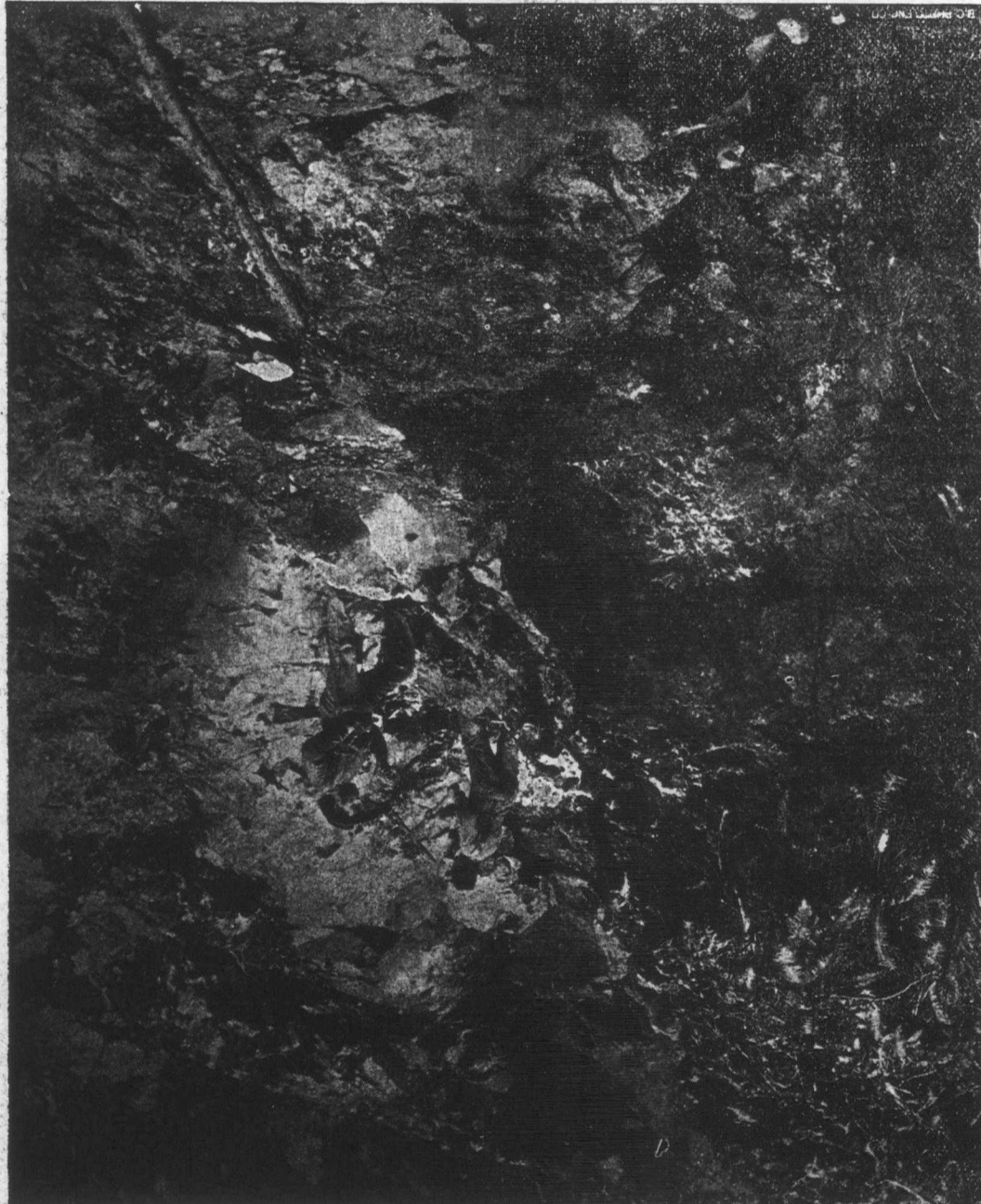
"So that if I had dropped in upon you some morning or evening you would not have been surprised?" "Why, never came. I watched and waited in vain."

"Ah! if I had only known you were thinking of me—"

"It is as well, perhaps, that you did not. If you had come Elizabeth would have been made suspicious." In a moment a shadow fell on Basil's face. He recalled his early impression or superstition. He saw now how the woman might cross his path, how she might become the evil genius of his life. She might try to separate him from Dorothy. She might use her undoubted power and influence against him. She might bring her will to bear upon Dorothy and upon her father. She might make shipwreck of all his hopes.

Then he lifted his head and smiled. Love laughs at locks and bolts it is said, and he felt that such a lock he could afford to laugh at any barrier that a woman might attempt to rear. "Do you think Elizabeth will be displeased when she gets to know?" he questioned. "She must not know for a long time," was the answer. "Any sudden shock might be dangerous, the doctor says."

"By how can you keep it from her?" "By not telling her," was the laughing response. "But she is bound to know sooner or later." "Oh, yes, of course, but it will have to dawn upon her gradually. Father and I will prepare her little by little, don't you see?"



NO. 2 CUT.—EARLY PROSPECTING—COMSTOCK PROPERTY.

merits of the most noteworthy of them; but after a while Dodo left them and stole back alone to Basil's picture. "Is it, I wonder, a riddle to be read?" she said to herself, as she looked eagerly at the canvas. "Does he intend me to see more than other people can see?" and the warm blood stole quickly again to her neck and face.

She was standing before the picture unconscious of the lapse of time when Basil came back to her. For a few moments he stood and looked at her with- out speaking. How beautiful she was, almost more beautiful than when he saw her last. The months that had passed since seemed to have ripened her loveliness and rounded her figure and given dignity to her pose.

"I wonder if she can read its meaning?" he said to himself; "or is it just a picture to her and nothing more?" He spoke to her at length. "Your father has left, Miss Dorothy, keep an appointment he has."

She turned suddenly and blushed. "Surely we have not been here so long?" she questioned. "It is a full hour since you came," he replied. "Time does fly very quickly."

"Why, it seems only five minutes since we came into the room," she said, "and I have not seen a dozen pictures." "We have the day before us," he answered with a smile. "I told Mr. Cleveland that we would lunch here."

"Oh, that is good of you," she replied; "so now we need not hurry at all." Hence it was scarcely likely that she had any suspicion of his feelings towards her. So with resolve he curbed his impatience. After lunch they made a circuit of the rooms and examined all the principal pictures. The time sped away like a dream. The afternoon was waning when they descended the steps together. In Pendarvis he hailed a hansom and they drove together to the Grand Hotel.

stopped directly in front of him. Pulling himself up suddenly with a little start, he raised his head, and there stood Dodo not five yards in front of him, her eyes sparkling, her face wreathed in smiles.

"Oh, I thought you always worked during the morning," she said, banteringly. "Not always," he said, grasping tightly her outstretched hand; "the truth is, I have been ordering some fresh canvases and colors."

"So you are preparing to begin again?" "Yes, when the inspiration comes."

"Have you got an idea?" "I have several, but I can't tell yet if anything will come of them."

"It must be very funny feeling round as it were in the dark, and waiting for the light to come." "It is often very irritating," he answered; "but may I walk along with you?"

"I'm going nowhere in particular," she replied; "I'm only putting the time away till father comes back. I walked along the Strand first, but found it too noisy. This is a delightful place, don't you think so?"

"It is very quiet and restful." "And the gardens are so nicely kept. I have been looking at the statue of Burns; I never noticed it before. It struck me as being a singularly pathetic figure."

"I never noticed it particularly," he answered. "Shall we walk past it?" and they walked away together.

There were not many people about, and most of the seats were unoccupied. After a while they set down into the sunshine. Faultily the roar of the floating down over the house-tops, the beating of the sea on a sandy beach.

"I think it is lovely sitting here," he said, "listening to the far-off

London streets." "But I thought you did not like London?" "Years ago when we lived in Pimlico I hated it; but I was only a girl then."

"And do you think you would like it now?" "I'm sure I should—that is, for the greater part of the year." "Perhaps your father will take a house here again some day."

"You don't know. You see, Elizabeth vows she will never put foot in London again." Basil was on the point of saying that that might be an advantage, but thought better of it, and so silence fell for several minutes.

Dorothy was the first to break it. "I went yesterday to have another look at your picture," she said, without raising her eyes, "and I liked it even better than at the first."

"I am so glad." "I was so interested in the faces of the poor people. What a variety of types you have!" "Yes, I had some difficulty in getting models."

"I cannot think how you imagined it all." "It was not all imagination," he answered, quickly. "I had seen you as the Lady Beautiful at Sandhurst."

"Oh, no, not like that. You cannot compare a glow-worm with the sun." "At that moment he was silent; then he said, quickly, "The picture is more yours than mine."

She started a startled glance at him and said, hurriedly: "I cannot at all imagine what you mean." "But for you it would never have been painted," he said, in the same low tone. "You were its inspiration. It grew out of my love for you."

She drew away from him suddenly and shifted her parasol, but did not speak. His face was very pale, his heart was throbbing wildly, in all other respects he seemed quite calm and self-possessed. "I did not mean to say this to you now," he went on, "but my resolution has broken down. Please do not be angry with me but bear me to the end."

He saw that she was trembling, but her eyes were turned away from him. "Perhaps you will think me guilty of great presumption, but I could not help loving you. To be with you day after day and week after week and not love you was impossible. All unconsciously you filled my life and dominated my will. I saw everything through the light and sunshine of your presence. Loving you called into play new thoughts and new ideas. It awoke a new power within me. I did nothing worthy to be remembered till love lived in my heart. O Dorothy, it was to win you that I painted the picture."

She turned upon him suddenly with big eyes and trembling lips. "Do you love me still?" she questioned. "Love you still?" he said, looking at her with a great yearning in his eyes. "Love you still? I love, then, a passion, the mood, the passion of a moment? O Dorothy, I shall love you for ever and ever."

She came closer to him and hid her hand in his. "And you are not angry?" he whispered with a smile. "Angry? I'm the happiest girl in all London to-day