

"Well, well, my dear," she re-commenced, "let us dismiss them and forget them. I hope you are going out again. You have only to signify a wish, you know. There will not be the slightest feeling in society—not the slightest."

"Really?" said Pauline, with an involuntary sarcasm which she could not repress.

But her aunt received the sarcasm in impervious good-faith. "Oh, not the slightest feeling," she repeated. "And I do hope, Pauline," she went on, with a certain distinct yet unexplained alteration of manner, "that you will make your *rentrée* as it were, at a little dinner I shall give Sallie next Thursday. It celebrates an event." Here Mrs. Poughkeepsie paused and looked full at her niece. "I mean Sallie's engagement."

"Sallie's engagement?" quickly murmured Pauline. The latter word had carried an instant personal force of reminder.

"Yes—to Lord Glenartney. You met him once or twice, I believe."

"Lord Glenartney!" softly iterated Pauline. She was thinking what a gulf of difference lay, for the august social intelligence of her aunt, between the separate bits of tidings which she and Mrs. Poughkeepsie had been waiting to impart, each to each.

"Yes, Glenartney has proposed to dear Sallie," began the lady, waxing promptly and magnificently confidential. "Of course it is a great match, even for Sallie. There can be no doubt of that. I don't deny it; I don't for an instant shut my eyes to it; I consider that would justly subject me to ridicule if I did. Lord Glenartney was not expected to marry in this country; there was no reason why he should do so. He is immensely rich; he has three seats, in England and Scotland. He is twice a Baron, besides being once an Earl, and he is first cousin to the Duke of Devergoil. Sallie has done well; I wish everybody to clearly understand, my dear Pauline, that I *think* Sallie has done brilliantly and wonderfully well. A mother always has ambitious dreams for her child. . . can a mother's heart help having them. But in my very wildest dreams I never calculated upon such a marriage for my darling child as this!"

Pauline sat silent before her aunt's final outburst of maternal fervour. She was thinking of the silly caricature upon all the manly worthiness that the Scotch peer just named had seemed to her. She was thinking of her own doleful, mundane marriage in the past. She was wondering what malign power had so crooked and twisted human wisdom and human sense of fitness, that a woman dowered with brains, education, knowledge of right and wrong, should thus exult (and in the sacred name of maternity as well!) over a union of this wofully sordid nature.

"I—I hope Sallie will be happy," she said, feeling that any real doubt on the point might strike her aunt as a piece of personal envy. "Curiously enough," she continued, "I, also have to tell you of an engagement, Aunt Cynthia."

Mrs. Poughkeepsie raised her brows in surprise. "Oh, you mean poor dear Lily Schenectady. I've heard of it. It has come at last, my dear, and he is only a clerk on about two thousand a year, besides not being of the *direct* line of the Auchinclosses, as one might say, but merely a sort of obscure relation. Still, it is stated that he has fair expectations; and then you know that poor dear Lily's freckles *are* a drawback, and that she has been cruelly called a spotted lily by some witty person, and that it has really become a nickname in society, and—"

"I did not refer to Lily Schenectady," here interrupted Pauline. "I spoke of myself."

The mine had been exploded. Pauline and Mrs. Poughkeepsie looked at each other.

"Pauline!" presently came the faltered answer.

"Yes, Aunt Cynthia, I spoke of myself. I am engaged to Mr. Kindelon."

"Mr. Kindelon!"

"Yes. I am sure you know who he is."

"Oh, I know who he is." Mrs. Poughkeepsie spoke these words with a ruminative yet astonished drawl.

"Well, I am engaged to him," said Pauline, stoutly but not over-assertively. She had never looked more composed, more simply womanly than now.

Mrs. Poughkeepsie rose. It always meant something when this lady rose. It meant a flutter of raiment, a deliberation of re-adjustment, a kind of superb, massive dislocation.

"I am horrified!" exclaimed the mother of the future Countess Glenartney.

Pauline rose, then, with a dry, chill gleam in her eyes. "I think that there is nothing to horrify you," she said.

Mrs. Poughkeepsie gave a kind of sigh that in equine phrase we might call a snort. Her large body visibly trembled. She rapidly drew forth a handkerchief from some receptacle in her ample-flowing costume, and placed it at her lips. Pauline steadily watched her, with hands crossed a little below the waist.

"I do so hope that you are not going to faint, Aunt Cynthia," she said, with a satire that partook of strong belligerence.

Mrs. Poughkeepsie, with her applied handkerchief, did not look at all like fainting as she glanced above the snowy cambric folds toward her niece.

"I—I never faint, Pauline. . . it is not my way. I—I know how to bear calamities. But this is quite horrible. . . it agitates me accordingly. I—I have nothing to say, and yet I—I have a great deal to say."

"Then don't say it!" now sharply rang Pauline's retort.

"Ah! you lose your temper! It is just what I might have thought—under the circumstances!"

Pauline clenched her teeth together for a short space, to keep from any

futile disclosure of anger. And presently she said, with a shrill yet even directness:

"What, pray, *are* the circumstances? I tell you that I am to marry the man whom I choose to marry. You advised me—you nearly *forced* me, once—to marry the man whom it was an outrage to make my husband!"

"Pauline!"

"What I tell you is true! He whom I select is not of your world! And, by the way, what is your world? A little throng of mannerists, snobs and triflers! I care nothing for such a world! I want a larger and a better. You say that I have failed in my effort to break down this barrier of conservatism which hedged me about from my birth. . . Well, allow that I *have* failed in that! I have not failed in finding some true gold from all that you sneer at as tawdry gloss! . . Tawdry! I did well to chance upon the word! What was that gentlemanly bit of vice whom you were so willing that I should marry a few years ago? You've just aired your tenets to me; I'll air a few of mine to you now. We live in New York, you and I. Do you know what New York means? It means what America means—or what America *ought* to mean, from Canada to the Gulf! And that is:—exemption from the hateful bonds of self-glorifying snobbery which have disgraced Europe for centuries! You call yourself an aristocrat. How dare you do so? You dwell in a land which was soaked with the blood, less than a century ago, of men who died to kill just what you boast of and exalt! Look more to your breeding and your brains, and less to your so-called caste! I come of your own blood and I can speak with right about it. What was it, less than four generations ago? You call it Dutch, and with a grand air. It flowed in the veins of immigrant Dutchmen, who would have opened their eyes with wonder to see the mansion you dwell in, the silver forks you eat with! *They* dwelt in wooden shanties and ate with pewter forks. . . Your objection to my marriage with Ralph Kindelon is horrible—that, and nothing more! He towers above the idiot whom you are glad to have Sallie marry! What do I care for the title 'Lord'? You bow before it; I despise it. You call my project, my dream, my desire, a failure. . . I grant that it is. But it is immeasurably above that petty worship of the Golden Calf, which *you* name respectability and which *I* denounce as only a pitiful sham! The world is growing older, but you don't grow old with it. You close your eyes to all progress. You get a modish milliner, you keep your pew in Grace Church, you drop a big coin into the plate when a millionaire hands it to you, and you are content. Your contentment is a pitiful fraud. Your purse could do untold good, and yet you keep it clasped—or, if you loose the clasp, you do it with a flourish, a vogue, an *éclat*. . . Mrs. Amsterdam has done the same for this or that asylum or hospital, and so you, with fashionable acquiescence, do likewise. And yet you—you, Cynthia Poughkeepsie, who tried to wreck my girlish life and almost succeeded—you, who read nothing of what great modern minds in their grandly helpful impulse toward humanity are trying to make humanity hear—you, who think the fit set of a patrician's gown above the big struggle of men and women to live—you, who immerse yourself in idle vanities and talk of everyone outside your paltry pale as you would talk of dogs—you dare to upbraid me because I announce to you that I will marry a man whom power of mind makes your superior, and whom natural gifts of courtesy make far more than your equal!"

As Pauline hotly finished she saw her aunt recede many steps from her.

"Oh, this—this is frightful!" gasped Mrs. Poughkeepsie. "It—it is the *theatre*! You will go on the stage, I suppose. It seems to me you have done everything but go on the stage, already! That would be the crowning insult to yourself—to your family!"

"I shan't go on the stage," shot Pauline, "because I have no talent for it. If I had talent, perhaps I would go. I think it a far better life for an American woman than to prate triumphantly about marrying her daughter to a titled English fool!"

Mrs. Poughkeepsie uttered a cry, at this point. She passed from the room, and Pauline, overcome with the excess of her disclaimer, soon afterward sank upon a chair. . .

An almost hysterical fit of weeping at once followed. . . It must have been a half-hour later when she felt Kindelon's face lowered to her own. He had nearly always come, since their engagement, at more or less unexpected hours.

"Some hateful thing has happened," he said very tenderly, "whom have you seen? Why do you sob so, Pauline? Have you seen her? Has Cora Dares been here?"

Pauline almost sprang from her chair, facing him. "Cora Dares," she cried, plaintively and with passion. "Why do you mention her name now?"

Kindelon folded her in his strong arms. "Pauline," he expostulated, "be quiet! I merely thought of what you yourself had told me, and of what I myself had told *you*. . . What is it, then, since it is not she? Tell me, and I will listen as best I can."

She soon began to tell him, leaning her head upon his broad breast, falteringly and with occasional severe effort.

"I—I was wrong," she at length finished. "I should not have spoken so rashly, so madly. . . But it was all because of you, Ralph, because of my love for you!"

He pressed her more closely within the arms that held her.

"I don't blame you!" he exclaimed. "You were wrong, as you admit that you were wrong. . . but I don't blame you!"

(To be continued.)