

A Pilgrim

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Illustrated by W. GOODE

THE servants had gathered in the front hall to inspect the new arrival—cook, kitchen-maid, butler, flanked on the right by parlormaid, on the left by a footman and a small Butters.

The new arrival was a snow-white bull-terrier, alert, ardent, quivering in expectation of a welcome among these strangers, madly wagging his whiplike tail in passionate silence.

When the mistress of the house at last came down the great stone stairway, the servants fell back in a semi-circle, leaving her face to face with the white bull-terrier.

"So that is the dog!" she said, in faint astonishment. A respectful murmur of assent corroborated her conclusion.

The dog's eyes met hers; she turned to the servants with a perplexed gesture.

"Is the brougham at the door?" asked the young mistress of the house.

The footman signified that it was.

"Then tell Phelan to come here at once."

Phelan, the coachman, arrived—large, rosy, freshly shaven, admirably correct.

"Phelan," said the young mistress, "look at that dog."

The coachman promptly fixed his eyes on the wagging bull-terrier. In spite of his decorous gravity a smile of distinct pleasure slowly spread over his square, pink face, until it became a subdued simper.

"Is that a well-bred dog, Phelan?" demanded the young mistress.

"It is, ma'am," replied Phelan, promptly.

"Very well-bred?"

"Very, ma'am."

"Dangerous?"

"In a fight, ma'am." Stifled enthusiasm swelled the veins on the coachman's forehead. Triumphant paeans of praise for the bull-terrier trembled upon his lips; but he stood rigid, correct, a martyr to his perfect training.

"Say what you wish to say, Phelan," prompted the young mistress, with a hasty glance at the dog.

"Thanky, ma'am. . . . The bull is the finest I ever laid eyes on. . . . He hasn't a blemish, ma'am; and the three years of him doubled will leave him three years to his prime, ma'am. . . . And there's never another bull, nor a screw-tail, nor cross, be it mastiff or fox or whippet, ma'am, that can loose the holt o' thim twin jaws. . . . Beg pardon, ma'am, I know the dog."

"You mean that you have seen that dog before?"

"Yes, ma'am; he won his class from a pup at the Garden. That is 'His Highness,' ma'am, Mr. Langham's champion three-year."

She had already stooped to caress the silent, eager dog—timidly, because she had never before owned a dog—but at the mention of his master's name, she drew back sharply and stood erect.

"Never fear, ma'am," said the coachman, eagerly; "he won't bite, ma'am—"

"Mr. Langham's dog?" she repeated, coldly; and then, without another glance at either the dog or the coachman, she turned to the front door; Buttons swung it wide with infantile dignity; a moment later she was in her brougham, with Phelan on the box and the rigid footman expectant at the window.

II.

SEATED in a corner of her brougham, she saw the world pass on flashing wheels along the asphalt; she saw the April sunshine slanting across brown-stone mansions and the glass-fronted facades of shops. . . . she looked without seeing.

So Langham had sent her his dog! In the first year of her widowhood she had first met Langham; she was then twenty-one. In the second year of her widowhood Langham had offered himself, and, with the declaration on his lips, had seen the utter hopelessness of his offer. They had not met since then. And now, in the third year of her widowhood, he offered her his dog!

She had at first intended to keep the dog. Knowing nothing of animals, discouraged from all sporting fads by a husband who himself was devoted to animals dedicated to Sport, she had quietly acquiesced in her husband's dictum that "horse-women and dog-women made a man ill!"—and so dismissed any idea he might have entertained towards the harbouring of the four-footed.

A miserable consciousness smote her; why had she allowed the memory of her husband to fade so amazingly in these last two months of early spring? Of late, when she wished to fix her thoughts upon her late husband and to conjure his face before her closed eyes, she found that the mental apparition came with more and more difficulty.

Sitting in a corner of her brougham, the sharp rhythm of her horses' hoofs tuning her thoughts, she quietly endeavored to raise that cherished mental spectre, but could not, until by hazard she remembered the portrait of her husband hanging in the smoking-room.

But instantly she strove to put that away; the portrait was by Sargent, a portrait she had always disliked, because the great painter had painted an expression into her husband's face which she had never seen there. An aged and unbearable aunt of hers had declared that Sargent painted beneath the surface; she resented the suggestion, because when she read

beneath the surface of her husband's portrait sent hot blood into her face.

Thinking of these things, she saw the spring sunshine gilding the gray branches of the park trees. Here and there elms spread tinted with green; chestnuts and maples were already in the full glory of new leaves; the leafless twisted tangles of wistaria hung thick with scented purple bloom; everywhere the scarlet blossoms of the Japanese quince glowed on naked shrubs, bedded in green lawns.

Her husband had loved the country. There was one spot in the world which he had loved above all others—the Sagamore Angling Club. She had never been there. But she meant to go. Probably to-morrow. And before she went she must send that dog back to Langham.

At the cathedral she signalled to stop, and sent the brougham back, saying she would walk home. And the first man she met was Langham.

III.

THERE was nothing extraordinary in it. His club was there on the corner, and it was exactly his hour for the club.

"It is so very fortunate . . . for me," he said. "I did want to see you. . . . I am going north to-morrow."

"Of course, it's about the dog," she said, pleasantly.

He laughed. "I am so glad that you will accept him—"

"But I can't," she said; "and thank you so much for asking me."

For a moment his expression touched her, but she could not permit expressions of men's faces to arouse her compunction, so she turned her eyes resolutely ahead towards the spire of the marble church.



They mounted the steps of her house. She turned and swept the dim avenue with a casual glance.

In Which it is Proven that Disillusionment Often Paves the Way for Future Happiness

He walked beside her in silence.

"I also am going north to-morrow," she said, politely. He did not answer.

Every day since her widowhood, every day for three years, she had decided to make that pilgrimage—some time. And now, crossing Union Square on that lovely afternoon late in April, she knew that the time had come. Not that there was any reason for haste. At the vague thought her brown eyes rested a moment on the tall young man beside her. . . .

Yes—she would go—to-morrow.

A vender of violets shuffled up beside them; Langham picked up a dewy bundle of blossoms, and their perfume seemed to saturate the air till it tasted on the tongue.

She shook her head. "No, no, please; the fragrance is too heavy."

"Won't you accept them?" he inquired, bluntly.

Again she shook her head; there was indecision in the smile, assent in the gesture. However, he perceived neither.

She took a short step forward. The wind whipped the fountain jet, and a fanlike cloud of spray drifted off across the asphalt. Then they moved on together.

Presently she said, quietly, "I believe I will carry a bunch of those violets"; and she waited for him to go back through the fountain spray, find the peddler, and rummage among the perfumed heaps in the basket. "Because," she added, cheerfully, as he returned with the flowers, "I am going to the East Tenth Street Mission, and I meant to take some flowers, anyway."

"If you would keep that cluster and let me send the whole basket to your mission—" he began.

But she had already started on across the wet pavement.

"I did not know you were going to give my flowers to those cripples," he said, keeping pace with her.

"Do you mind?" she asked, but she had not meant to say that, and she walked a little more quickly to escape the quick reply.

"I want to ask you something," he said, after a moment's brisk walking. "I wish—if you don't mind—I wish you would walk around the square with me—just once—"

"Certainly not," she said; "and now you will say good-bye—because you are going away, you say." She had stopped at the Fourth Avenue edge of the square. "So good-bye, and thank you for the beautiful dog, and for the violets."

"But you won't keep the dog, and you won't keep the violets," he said; "and, besides, if you are going north—"

"Good-bye," she repeated, smiling.

"—besides," he went on, "I would like to know where you are going."

"That," she said, "is what I do not wish to tell you—or anybody."

There was a brief silence; the charm of her bent head distracted him.

"If you won't go," she said, with caprice, "I will walk once around the square with you, but it is the silliest thing I have ever done in my entire life."

"Why won't you keep the bull-terrier?" he asked, humbly.

"Because I'm going north—for one reason."

"Couldn't you take His Highness?"

"No—that is, I could, but—I can't explain—he would distract me."

"Shall I take him back, then?"

"Why?" she demanded, surprised.

"I—only—I thought if you did not care for him—" he stammered. "You see, I love the dog."

SHE bit her lip and bent her eyes on the ground. Again he quickened his pace to keep step with her.

"You see," he said, searching about for the right phrase "I wanted you to have something that I could venture to offer you—er—something not valuable—er—I mean not—er—"

"Your dog is a very valuable champion; everybody knows that," she said, carelessly.

"Oh yes,—he's a corker in his line; out of Empress by Ameer, you know—"

"I might manage—to keep him—for a while," she observed, without enthusiasm. "At all events, I shall tie my violets to his collar."

He watched her; the roar of Broadway died out in his ears; in hers it grew, increasing, louder, louder. A dim scene rose unbidden before her eyes—the high gloom of a cathedral, the great organ's first unsteady throbbing—her wedding march! No, not that; for while she stood, coldly transfixed in centred self-absorption, she seemed to see a shapeless mass of wreaths piled in the twilight of an altar—the dreadful pomp and panoply and circumstance of death.

She raised her eyes to the man beside her; her whole being vibrated with the menace of a dirge, and in the roar of traffic around her she divined the imprisoned thunder of the organ pealing for her dead.

She turned her head sharply towards the west.

"What is it?" he asked, in the voice of a man who needs no answer to his question.

She kept her head steadily turned. Through Fifteenth Street the sun poured a red light that deepened as the mist rose from the docks. She heard the river whistles