

DOCTOR ZAY.

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VII.—(Continued.)

She got into the phaeton and sat beside him, leaning back, and watching him with a gentle eagerness which he would have dared to call tender if he had not remembered that it was professional. "I will eat it all," said Yorke.

She made a pretence of sharing the slice with him, but he could see that she was keenly excited.

"Now," she said, when the bread and coffee were gone, "are you better? Are you strong enough to hear what I want of you?"

"Try me and see."

"They are together there,"—she pointed to the poor girl's house,—"those two, who ought to be together for all their lives. *Il* is the man."

"The drowned man?" cried Yorke. She nodded fiercely.

"I want you to come up there with me. I want you for a witness. I may fail in the thing, but it's got to be tried. I can't have any of those fellows there, and there's nobody at home but a young step-mother, who won't come near us. Are you able to do this?"

Yorke replied by silently taking the reins. He, too, felt excited and strong. They drove up the steep, short hill, and close to the poor place. At the gate stood a wagon, containing an elderly and gentlemanly but very impatient person. A few men were hanging about the door-steps. The doctor helped her patient out, and he followed her into the house, asking no questions.

They went into a low, clean room on the ground floor. A man was there upon a lounge, swathed in blankets; he was ghastly white. A girl hung over him: she uttered low, inarticulate cries; she rained her tears upon his face, his hands,—nay, her kisses on his great coarse feet, as if he were her Saviour. The doctor shut the door softly, and Yorke stood uncovered beside her. The girl noticed them no more than if they had been spirits.

"Why, Molly?" said the fellow weakly. "Why, *Molly*? I hain't done so well by you that you should—kiss me—now. I don't deserve it," he added, after a moment's thought.

"Molly," said the doctor, coming forward with her nervous step, "leave Jim to me a minute. I want to talk to him."

Molly gathered herself together, a miserable little effort,—shame and love and tears,—and obeyed. She was a pretty girl, with blonde hair.

"Deserve it," said Doctor Zay, in a changed manner, as soon as the girl was gone. "Deserve it? You have behaved to her like a coward and a sneak. She is behaving like—a woman. She loves him, I suppose," added the doctor in an undertone. "This is the way with these women. Now, then, Jim Paisley: I have just this to say to you. You are able to sit up. Let me see you do it."

The resuscitated man struggled to an obtuse angle against the pillows.

"Very good. I wish you could stand up, but that will do. I want you to marry Molly. I will call her back."

"But, Doctor?"—began Jim.

"No shilly-shallying," returned the doctor sharply. "Not a word. Let me see it done before I leave the house. I sent Henry for the minister the first breath you drew,—out there on the shore,—before I sent for the brandy, before you gasped twice. He is sitting at the gate this minute, with a borrowed horse, too, that he's in a hurry to get back to a man who is mowing. Don't waste any more of our time. It's too precious for you. Come!"

"But, Doctor, how can I be married, done up in blankets like a mummy. It's—so—ridiculous!" pleaded Jim. "I'd have liked my best clothes on."

"Paisley!" said the doctor, towering and superb, "did I work over you fourteen minutes after every man in Sherman would have given you up for dead? Fourteen minutes longer than is laid down by Hering, too," she added, turning to Yorke.

"Well, Doctor, I s'pose you did."

"Did I bring back the soul to your senseless, sinful body, after it had gone God knows where, but where you'll never go again till you go to stay?"

"That's a fact, Doctor. Yes, marm."

"I've got some rights in your life, have I, Jim?"

"Yes, marm. I don't deny you brought me to."

"Do you suppose you were worth *touching*, except that you had it in your miserable power to right a poor wronged girl? Come! Do you?"

"No, marm."

"If you don't marry Molly before I leave this house, every lumberman in Sherman may throw you into the mill-pond,—and some of them will. I'll stand by and see them do it. I won't lift a finger for you."

"You're hard on a fellow," complained Jim.

"I hain't said I wouldn't. I only said I'd rather wait and get my best close. I um, when I come to, and— Good Lord! did you see her, Doctor? I hain't done right by her, that's a fact. I told her so."

"Well, well!" said Doctor Zay, softening. She went at once to call the girl, who lay crouched like a spaniel outside the door, upon the bare entry floor. "Come here, Molly," she said, with ineffable gentleness. "Jim wants to be married."

Molly stood still. The color slowly crept over her delicate neck.

"He hain't asked me himself," she said. Jim held out his hand to her.

"The doctor thought I wasn't fit to ask you, Molly. She ain't far out, either."

The girl advanced slowly, looking at him searchingly. Then, with a certain dignity, she gave the man one hand, and said,—

"Very well, Doctor."

The minister came, talking about his borrowed horse. He was worried and hurried.

"Where is your certificate of intention to marry?" he asked, shortly, "we require five days' notice of intention in our State."

"The marriage will be legal," replied Dr. Zay, promptly. "I've had occasion to look into that. Whatever formalities are necessary, I will attend to myself. I will pay your fine, if you are called to account for this."

"It is a large fine," said the minister, slowly.

"I will be responsible for it," persisted the Doctor. "I must see the thing done now. Something might go wrong with the case yet. The man is very weak."

The old minister yielded his point after a little feeble protest; he wanted to get back to his mowing.

Yorke and the physician witnessed the marriage. And the young step-mother, out in the front yard, gossiped with the lumbermen through it all.

Doctor Zay took her patient home immediately when the painful scene was over. He was greatly exhausted. She sent him at once to bed, left minute orders for his care, and went off on her afternoon rounds.

In the evening she came to him again. She sat some time. She was anxious, gentle, half deprecating. She gave her professional tenderness a beautiful freedom. He felt her sympathy like a sparkling tonic. She atoned for what she had cost him by a divine hour.

"She did not mention the poor girl. But Yorke thought of the caryatide lifting marble arms to hold the Temple 'high above our heads.'"

VIII.

The patient continued for several days clearly worse for the episode of Molly and Jim. The physician was penitently assiduous in her attentions. As soon as he was better they cooled off quietly, but so obviously that Mrs. Butterwell turned her soft eyes, not without sympathy, upon her invalid lodger.

"She's like a candle,—knows her mould, and gets into it, and no fuss. Some folks are like ice-cream: can't freeze without churning. Doctor's always just so with patients. I wouldn't notice her,—she has to be; they'd lean her life out."

In fact, Yorke found himself reduced to his office-calls again, and to a limited allowance of those. He now took occasional meals with the family, and thus sometimes met her at the table. She was very irregular. The office-bell pealed, or Handy summoned her authoritatively; or she was hours behind time. She nodded to him kindly when she came, or they chatted a few moments. She glanced at him with her direct, brilliant, healthy look. He watched her with his sad, refined, invalid eyes. She poured her abundant personality into half a hundred empty lives a day. He received into his vacant hours the influences of the moment. She went; he stayed. He suffered; she acted. He remembered; she forgot.

One day he called her, as he sat on the piazza. She was coming from the dining-room, after a late and hurried dinner. She had her hat and gloves in her hand. "Doctor," he said, "do you know that this is August?"

"It is the 3d,—yes."

"I thought you wouldn't know. How did you happen to?"

"I always date my prescriptions."

"I might have known there was a scientific reason. For, as nearly as an ignorant layman can observe, the seasons slip away from your attention like cured patients. One is like another to you. Doctor Zay, do you know that you have never asked me to call on you?"

"To call on—Oh, you mean"—she stopped.

"As a person, I mean, not a patient. Is there any reason why I shouldn't?"

"Why, no!" she said cordially,—"none in the world."

"Only you never thought of it."

"That is all," quietly.

"All!" cried Yorke.

She swept upon him a fine look; half rebuke, like a monarch's, half perplexity, like a little girl's. He hastened to placate this expression.

"Would you like to have me come? I had rather be denied than endured."

"That is manly. So should I. Certainly I should like to see you. Only I never am at

home. I suppose it was rude not to ask you before. I am so out of the way of—all these little things."

She spoke the last three words with an accent before which his heart shrank. But he only said,—

"May I come—to-night?"

"Oh, yes," she answered lightly; "any time you like, after office-hours and before your bedtime."

"I'm coming," he said, in a low, significant tone.

"What did you say?"

He rose and confronted her. He leaned upon his crutch, but she felt that the man was waxing strong.

"I'm coming," he repeated firmly.

She had turned to go, but regarded him for an instant over her shoulder. A beautiful mocking light darted from her lip to her eye. She did not say a word. But he heard every nerve in the woman defy him. It was like the challenge before a battle. The convalescing man welcomed the signal of contest.

He went that evening, "after office hours and before bedtime," dutifully, as she had bidden. It was a superb evening, and he lingered a moment outside the door to watch the western colors behind the forest. He had already acquired that half-plaintive sympathy with the setting sun which is noticeably a feature in the lives of invalids. Is it because the hour marks another finished period of suffering, or that it promises renewal of life, which is always resurrection of hope?

It was a quiet sunset of pale chimes and violets, sinking gently into gray below, melting to the deep blue of advancing night above. The long forest, with its procession of pine outlines, cut the horizon. The heavy mists of the Maine evening rose from the little river and the mill-ponds. This fog caught fire, and the village seemed to stagger in it. Mr. and Mrs. Isaiah Butterwell were picking currants together in the garden, stooping to their task in the level light; they did not watch the sunset. Handy was watering old Oak at the spring in the pasture behind the barn. The stage was late, and two worn horses struggled, with hanging heads, up the lonely street. Two or three lumbermen followed the stage, singing. They sang a chorus which ran,—

"Thus with the man, thus with the tree.
Sharp at the root the axe shall be."

Mr. Butterwell called out to the driver to toss him over a paper. The stage crawled on, and turned the corner to the post office. The fire fell from the mists, the deserted road grew gray, and Yorke felt damp as soon as the color dropped.

The solitude of the scene oppressed him at that moment, as if he had known that he should never have power to separate himself from it. The limit of life in this poor place, its denial, its desolation, came to his consciousness with the vividness and remorselessness of personal fate. He thought of going back to Boston, and leaving her. He rang the office-bell sharply, and entered without waiting for it to be answered.

No one was in the reception-room, and he passed through. The office was empty. All the doors were open. As he stood hesitating, she came from the parlor beyond. She stood in the doorway, and held out her hand.

"Ah, it is you!" she said graciously. He was confused by a consciousness of change in her, but could not have told what it was. As he followed her into the room, he perceived that the impression came from her dress. She wore a muslin gown of a violet color; it was finished at the throat and wrists by fluttering satin ribbons and lace; it was a cool, sheer thing, as befitted the warm night,—a parlor dress, sweeping the floor. He had always seen her in her business clothes.

He was not sure at first that he liked to see her in any other way. He felt a vague jealousy of her individuality, on which this dainty feminine gear seemed to encroach. But in a moment, when he had accustomed his eye to the transformation, he acknowledged that he would not have missed it for the world.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in her outright fashion; her profession had cultivated in her, to perhaps an extreme limit, what was probably great native directness of manner.

"Excuse me. Was I staring? I have never seen you in a—don't you call them trails?"

She blushed a little looking over her shoulder down at the wave of purple color, out of which she seemed to rise as if she floated on it.

"I do not wear such things. I do not respect them," she said, with a latent vexation in her voice. "I feel as if I ought to apologize to my womanhood or something, every time I encumber my feet and other people's in this way. But it was so warm, and this the coolest thing I have. I had been dusty and uncomfortable all day. And it is pretty, in itself, I think; don't you?"

"I shall not—that is to say I cannot—tell you what I think," he answered. The undisguised admiration in his eyes rained over her with daring leisure.

It was characteristic of these two people—and to which the more creditable, one can hardly say—that it no more occurred to the young man that there was a remote touch of pardonable feminine coquetry in the coincidence of his call and the violet muslin than it did to the lady that he might think so. Doctor Zay knew how often she wore that gown on warm evenings, shut in alone in her dark little parlor, after the last patient was gone, after the care and fever of

the long day were spent,—when the doctor melted into the woman. And Yorke was beginning to know Doctor Zay.

He took the easy-chair which she offered him, quietly observing the scene upon which he had fallen, and in which the violet muslin was only what artists would call the "high light." After his hair-cloth sofa and framed certificate, this young lady's parlor affected him like a restored and precious painting. As felt the powerful influence of the cultivated interior, to which he yielded with that composite emotion, half homesickness, half instinct, which we all know, and which draws the exile from what we are pleased to call "the world," like a magnet, back.

Yorke, as he sat and talked of little things, assimilated his surroundings gently: the books, the engravings, few but fine, the bronze Psyche, the little landscape of Gifford's, magazines, newspapers, reviews, and colors that he had not seen since he left home.

While she busied herself in drawing the long curtains and lighting the lamps, he noticed the Chickering upright across the corner, and a curious afghan, knit of dull, harmonious tints, like a Persian rug. There were flowers, too. The lamps had green and yellow globes. There were many pillows in the room, of odd shapes, and all sorts of hospitable things to sit on: an open fire-place, filled now with ferns; yet nothing seemed to be a reproduction of a fashionable craze. There was no incoherent attempt at affecting cracked bric-a-brac, deteriorated Japanese art, or doubtful colonial fashions. One did not even think of Queen Anne or Louis Quinze, but only of Doctor Zay, who had a pleasant room and lived there.

It affected Yorke strongly to meet his doctor here,—a lady, like other ladies, in a shelter, among little lovely things, quiet and set apart, protected from encroachments, forgetful of care. He was glad that the patients were never allowed to come into that room. He felt dizzy with his own privilege.

He leaned his head back against his boldly modern but proportionally easy chair, and watched her, while they chatted pleasantly. They talked of Boston, of books, of people, of well things. Left to herself, he noticed that she avoided all pathological subjects with a rigor which in itself was all that reminded him of their existence. She made no inquiries about the state of his prevailing sensations, nor alluded in any way to his relation as a patient to herself. She had a fine tact in this, which made him feel as if he were a well man again. He rested in her dainty vicinity, the quiet things she said, the sound of her voice, the delicacy of her dress, in herself. He forgot for one delicious hour the real and rugged world in which she lived. Or rather, perhaps, if he analyzed his feeling, he had a vague sense of mastery, as stimulating as it was unprecedented, as if he himself were the agent, not the subject, of a new experience, in which he drew her from a consecration to a dream.

He asked her to play for him.

"No," she said, "you are a Bostonian."

"But not a critic."

"Impossible! You approve the Handel and Haydn, and patronize the Symphony. You do your duty by the prevailing artists; hold them at arm's-length as I do my last new babies, with about the same complacency in their existence, as if the Creator had an obligation to you for the fact. You are like the man who declined to be a vegetarian on the ground that *pâté de foie gras* was good enough for him. I had a patient once who abandoned smoking because his taste had developed so fastidious a quality that he could find no tobacco fine enough for him."

"I am still a crude smoker. Play for me, please!"

"I know two tunes: one is China, and the other isn't. Which will you have?"

"The other one. Play for me!"

"It is a Scotch song. Do you like Scotch songs?"

"Do you sing?"

"Not in the least. I can play you the accompaniment."

He made a little movement of impatience. He was by nature of a restless, not to say an imperious temper, which his illness (or perhaps it would be more precise to say, his physician) had subdued rather than instigated.

Her ready merriment came to her eyes.

"You cannot make me believe," he insisted, "that you are not musical. Physicians are."

"That is true enough," she answered, quickly warming to the subject. "Science is harmony. Music and science are twins. Music is the feminine, though, I think."

"It is a fine marriage. Oh, you called them twins, though."

"You are not so far out of the way. There is an element of twinning in all absolute marriage." This was said with her scientific expression, as if she were dissecting a radial artery.

"How many 'absolute' marriages have you known?" asked Yorke, as nearly as possible in the same tone.

"Just three," said Doctor Zay.

"In all your experience? Only three that would—that you would have been satisfied with?"

"It is not a question of what would satisfy one's self," she said, freezing swiftly and lightly, like thin November ice. "It is a matter of psychological investigation."

"What a horrible advantage over mankind your profession gives!" said Yorke, between his teeth. She nodded gravely.

"It is unmatched, I believe. Even the clergy have a poor one beside us. We stand at an