

Will Marshall—but everybody called him Mr. Will, and we may as well—was a man of thirty-five, who had passed through wide and varied experiences. He had been an apt scholar in the school of humanity, and had learned to note character from feature and expression. He had given more time than usual to the reading of Bell's, when he reached the sum of it all in, "capable of being attractive and truly useful, if only aroused"—a woeful little "if."

Bell was too accustomed to attention, to not desire it, and feel lost, in a strange place without it. She was used to hearing about her personal charms, and compliments never confused her; they had been food and drink to her disposition ever since she put on long dresses, or rather since the long dresses had been put on her, and she laid in the cradle to be admired. No wonder this quiet country life was stupid to her. There was nothing in it for the vanity to feed on. As she was the only young lady in the house, there could be no rivalry. The married ladies expended their powers of admiration on their offspring. Bell, not wickedly inclined, suffered the husbands to read their everlasting newspapers unmolested. While the one single gentleman in the house, Will Marshall, was "dictatorial and intensely disagreeable," quoting from Bell's private commentary, made also on the second day of her acquaintance with the occupants of the farm house.

This second day, a day of conclusions as it appeared, had been Sunday. Bell dragged herself into the breakfast-room about ten o'clock, and sat down to a cup of hot strong coffee, just as the majority of the household were starting for the little white church on the hill. Her pale face, and heavy eyes were enough to excuse her not joining them.

The afternoon found her lying on the sofa, in the sitting-room. Harry and Mamie, his younger sister, were begging auntie Bell to tell them just a little we bit of a story, for a day without any play time in it was a long one for the little ones to get through with.

But she put aside their pleadings with a "go away children, and do not bother me when I am reading."

Will Marshall, sitting on the piazza just outside of the window nearest the sofa, understood her annoyance better than she did. Calling the little ones to him, he offered to tell them stories. He did not draw them from his own imagination, though his was of that vivid nature to paint pictures to the life. But he told them first a story of patience, beginning with the baby-boy who was called Moses. Then he told them of a wonderful life full of earnest zeal and work, and the man's name in that case was Samuel. Then, when they clamored for more, and the older children had joined them, he repeated the little German story of the mission of flowers.

Bell, against her will, listened to every word that came so distinctly through the open window. She felt her impatience, her indifferent laziness, her frivolity and selfishness condemned in each sentence, and hated him for it, because it made her hate something, and she would not hate herself.

They had met in the hall, coming from supper, and he had asked, casually, what was her interesting book. She was prepared for some surprise, in her vexation was rather pleased to evoke it, and answered promptly, Reinald Archer. That he was surprised and more disappointed was evident. And, as Mrs. Strong tritely observed during the evening, "The two young people did not appear to get on very well together." It was then Bell had made her mental memorandum, "conceited, sanctimonious, intensely disagreeable, etc." And he had noted her as "a girl on the road to mental ruin, if—"

Now it was Thursday, and Bell had been a fortnight in the farm-house, when Harry so unceremoniously interrupted her reading. She was a favorite with the child, notwithstanding she was often cross and unwilling to comply with his requests. Harry could have said with much truth: "When she's good, she's very good; when she's bad, she's horrid;" from the last mood he always kept away.

Of course, since that first Sunday, Bell and Mr. Will had met; in truth they had been much together in spite of Bell's plainly evinced avoidance. She grew more and more nervous and ill at ease when with him, the outward expression being a series of rash remarks and actions showing the worst side of her character, if they really belonged there. She would not take the trouble to conceal her annoyance, and was continually drawing out the man, who pitied her with a great pity, to say the very things that exasperated her. Vexed he would be at himself for saying them, when he watched the scorn creeping about her mouth, and resolve not to offend again, only to break his resolution at the next aggression or gauntlet thrown at his feet. So great was his pity and desire to help her.

Bell called it preaching, advised him to become a missionary, and bestowed various other little sneers upon him for his pity and his pains.