

DOCTOR ZAY.

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VI.—(Continued.)

Doctor Zay was sitting by her office table. A half-open drawer showed surgical instruments. Rows of vials exhibited mysterious white pellets and powders. Medical books lay open underneath her hat and gloves, which she had tossed down on coming in. But Handy regarded these points with the apathy of familiarity. The environment did not interest this scientific child. Doctor Zay, who drove the fastest horse in Sherman, who always knew by an awful omniscience whether you missed a painful or shook the oat-measure; Doctor Zay, who had got old Doctor Adoniram's practice half away from him; Handy's Doctor Zay, was bent and bowed over her office table, her face crushed into her resolute hands, as if she had been stricken down by a power that no man could see.

If Handy's education had progressed a little farther he would have called this a phenomenon. As it was, he could only say,—

"It's a thunderin' Ananias'n' Sapphistry shame. Nothin' but a Bailey baby!"

It occurred to Handy, as he walked sadly away, over the heavy wet heads of the clover-tops, back to the sawdust heap by the wood-pile, that perhaps he had peeped as far for that one night as the perquisites of his calling allowed.

"Two of 'em," reflected Handy. "Heads down, like unlucky coppers. One on his crutch. Tother on her leanin'. Bobailey an' all his tribe ain't wuth it."

Handy was confused by jealous of something. He imagined it was Bob Bailey.

The doctor was called out that night to see a poor girl, three miles away. Handy accompanied her. As they drove through the chilly dawn together, Handy's emotions waxed mighty within him.

"Doctor?" he said, in a pleasant, confidential way.

"Well, Handy?"

"Is Mr. Yorke wuss?"

"Why, no, Handy."

"Ain't wrong in his head or nothin', is he?"

"Oh, no, Handy."

"Well, I didn't know. While you were taking on so about the Baileybaby, he flopped over on them Bangor crutches, and says he, 'Poor girl!' He says it out loud. I hearn him. Now, you know, you ain't a girl; you're a doctor. I thought may be he was a nite looney, and we'd ought to look after him. Do you keep any medicine for loons, Doctor?"

She made her call, as usual, the next morning; a very short one. Yorke had hoped he knew not what, he knew not why, from it; she left him only his powders and his disappointment. It was impossible to draw her within telescopic sweep of a personality. She had seemed near to him in that outburst of grief, last night, as if some kindly or friendly impulse in her reached out its hands to him; precisely by the width of that impulse was she now removed. He had had his day's orders from his doctor; nothing more. She looked, as Mrs. Butterwell had prophesied, really ill. He thought of her; he thought of her till he was ashamed to think how long it was since he had thought of anything else. The terrible leisure of invalidism gaped, a gulf, and filled itself with her. If he could have arisen like a man, and bridged it, or like a hero, and leaped into it, she would never, he said to himself doggedly, have this exquisite advantage over him. He lay there like a woman, reduced from activity to endurance, from resolve to patience, while she amassed her importance to him,—how idly!—like gold that she gave herself no trouble to count.

He was surprised that night at receiving a second visit; but his momentary gratification quickly spent itself. Her errand was to inform him that she should not come again.

"I do not understand you," Doctor Lloyd," said the young man, with an effort of composure; his breath shortened, and he felt dizzy and faint.

"Oh, I mean, if you are able, won't you come to the office?" she answered wearily. "I am preoccupied, and begin wrong end foremost. I do not mean to neglect you. But I really think you able to get around to my door. The air and exercise will be beneficial to you. There is no reason for my coming to you so often. You can take the morning hour, from eight to nine, or the one at noon, as you prefer."

She gave that slight and fine emphasis of hers to the word "reason."

"This means that I am not to see you—here—any longer?"

"Not unless it is necessary."

"Suppose I find it necessary, Dr. Lloyd?"

"I must be the judge of that, Mr. Yorke."

"Very well," said Yorke, after a moment's thought, "I will come to your office to-morrow."

He went. He stumped around on the Bangor crutches over the piazza to the office door, which set forth the legend "Z. A. Lloyd, M.D.," in modest little letters of gray and gold. The reception-room was partly full. Five or six women sat there, and a child or two; one man,

a lumberman, who said Puella said she wanted more powders for that crookedness in her mind. Another man came, while Yorke waited, with what he called an "order" for an immediate call on his wife. Doctor Zay nodded to Yorke pleasantly when she came out, but did not speak. He perceived that he was to bide his turn, like any other patient. The doctor said, "Next?" as if they had been children at school. She was abstracted and pale. She had that look of application which failed of being beautiful. The reception-room was rather pleasant. It was clear that the young lady furnished her own part of the house. Yorke took in an idle, luxurious sense of familiar photographs and even a high-art carpet. There were flowers all over the room, and a table covered with books and periodicals for the patients. Some of the women were reading. He took up yesterday's Boston Advertiser, and hid his amusement, if not his embarrassment behind it.

Presently he realized that they had all gone. Doctor Zay stood waiting for him, gravely. He followed her into the office: a tiny room, hardly more than a generous closet. She shut the door and motioned him to a chair. She took her own at the desk where the vials were. Her ledgers and note-book, and one or two volumes of Materia Medica, were lying about. The office, he saw at once, was lined from floor to ceiling with book-cases, all full. The doctor waited a moment, as if for him to begin his daily report. He did not. She raised her eyes quickly to his face, and that sensitive change he liked so much crossed her own. Then, for the first time, he saw signs of embarrassment in her. She colored a little, and he smiled.

"Really, Doctor," he said, "do you think this is an improvement?"

She hesitated before she answered: "Really, I—don't know."

"Keeping me here among all those ladies,—the only fellow, except Puella's. He didn't stay by me long. I think, for my own part, it was much better in my room."

"Perhaps it was," she admitted, "but—"

"But you don't want to come any longer?"

"Frankly, Mr. Yorke, no."

"Then you shan't. I won't be more disagreeable than I must. I will come to the office, as you wish. But why cannot I have a separate hour, after the women are gone? It seems to me it would be quite as pleasant, and much less—he, too, hesitated before adding, "noticeable."

"I hardly know," said Doctor Zay, knitting her brows. "There are precedents, exactly." He had never seen her irresolute before. She looked fatigued and annoyed. "There are new questions constantly arising," she went on, "for a woman in my position. One ceases to be an individual. One acts for the whole,—for the sex, for a cause, for a future. We are not quite free, like other people, in little perplexities. It is what Paul said about no man's living to himself. We pay a price for our privilege. I suppose everything in this world renders its cost, but nothing so heavily, nothing so relentlessly, as an unswerving purpose in a woman. Nothing is more expensive than sustained usefulness,—or what one tries to make such. I hate to think of petty things!" she added, with some fire.

"Then don't!" urged the young man. "I cannot see the need of it, in a case like yours. You are an antidote to pettiness. You eat it out, like a swift and beautiful vitriol. You would make us all ashamed of it. I cannot exist where you are. I felt that in you the first time I saw you. And pretense,—I had got so tired of pretense. You went on your way so simply. You were so thorough. I said, There is a trained woman. She is honest all through. She has the modesty of knowledge. I thought all this while you were tying that artery, before I fainted. What a faint that was!"

"You overestimate me, Mr. Yorke," said the doctor, rather distantly. And yet he was sure that he had not displeased her.

"I have sometimes wondered," he went on, with an awkward courage, "what you thought of me, the first time you saw me. I dare say you couldn't remember. I don't presume, believe me, that it was of much importance."

"Oh, yes, I remember perfectly," said Doctor Zay, laughing. "I thought, of concussion and dislocation! Possibly a fine compound fracture. I have never had a compound fracture. I've always wanted one."

"And I have always thought, always maintained, that the scientific temperament is the hardest among civilized types." He broke himself against that flint, he heard said once of a sensitive man, in a miserable instance,—it happened to be a marriage, but that doesn't affect the point. One comes upon such a nature as against the glacial period: it solidifies against you; it never bends nor shatters."

"Nor melts?" she asked, smiling (he could see) out of pure mischief.

"In the course of ages, I suppose. Too late to be of practical service. One freezes in the process."

"The best thing that could happen!" she said quickly.

A white light darted over the young man's

face, and passed. He was a remarkably fine-looking fellow in these swift pallors. He shook himself, as if to shake his weakness off.

"Come, Doctor," he said, lightly enough. "Tell me! Was that all you thought when I fell into your remorseless hands?"

"No," she said gravely and gently. "I thought—His mother would not know him."

"Was I so hideous?"

"Yes, you were badly mangled."

"Well, I am even with you. That first time you touched me, I thought I was in hell."

"Yes, sir; you made the fact quite evident, particularly when I set the ankle."

"And now," he said, leaning his head back in the office chair, and dreamily regarding her across the little distance that separated them,— "now I am in—"

The doctor looked at her watch, and moved back her chair.

"I have spent fifteen minutes on you!" she said, in a tone of vexation too genuine to be mistaken by the blindest feeling for a freak of feminine coyness. "So long out of this short morning! And I have thirty-five calls to make before supper. Continue the remedy you have, till to-morrow. Then call on me again, here. Come at noon; the office will not be so full, then. You may be a little late, if you like. You may come to me twice a week, now, for an office call. If you need extra attention,—but I do not think you will,—I will call on you, as formerly. You must excuse me now."

"Twice a week!" cried the patient. She made him no answer, rang her bell for Handy, and, putting on her feathered hat, walked rapidly away.

Yorke sat in the office a few minutes where she had left him; he looked confusedly about. It seemed to him that he was taking her up in new and unknown conditions, like the second volume of a novel. He turned the leaves with a dull uneasiness. Something in him urged, "Throw the book down!" He searched his soul for power to arise and do so. He found there only a great compulsion, as silent and as terrible as the thread in the hand of Lachesis, which he knew would bind him down to read on to the end.

VII.

He did not go at noon. It occurred to him in the morning that he was well enough to wait till the evening office. He dreamed away his day on the piazza, watching her as she went and came; lost in admiration of his own self-restraint, and in a nebulous impression that it was time to take matters into a more strictly masculine control.

She did not come home till eight o'clock. The July twilight was already deepening down. Handy came up from the depths of the sawdust heap, and retired from public life with Old Oak; the doctor went to her supper; and Yorke got around into the reception-room, and waited for her in the dusk. No other patients were there. Roses were in the room somewhere,—he could not see them. The folds of the long muslin curtains drifted in the warm wind. The rows of books in the office, seen through the open door, looked fuller for the darkness. Beyond them, another door led into the doctor's private parlor. He had heard Mrs. Butterwell say that her lodger had three rooms below ("two and a half," Mrs. Butterwell called them), and one up-stairs. This other door was half open, swinging idly on its hinges in the perfumed air. He sat and watched it till she came in. It did not open; it would not shut.

She did not see him at first, and he admired the fine unconsciousness of her movements as she crossed the rooms. She lighted her German student lamp on the office table, and, pulling a formidable professional book towards her, without a moment's irresolution, plunged into its contents with the headlong dash which only an absorbing intellectual passion gives. She leaned her head upon her hand, with her controlled profile towards him, while she read. He contrasted this little act cruelly with his invalid reveries.

A woman who says, "My life is too full to have need of you," will be met by the historic unmasculine privilege of reply, "You take the trouble to mention it. I reserve the benefit of the doubt." Doctor Zay took the trouble to mention nothing.

The young man had seen for himself that which all the little feminine protest in the world could never have made patent to his imagination: a woman absorbed in her business, to whom a man must be the accident, not the substance, of thought.

He rose at once, and made her aware of his presence. She expressed the slight, superficial surprise of a preoccupied person, whose life brings her in constant contact with the unexpected. She met him very cordially. He vaguely felt that she approved of him for staying away half a day longer than was necessary. He limped over to the office chair. She shut the door, and he surrendered himself to the brief medical consultation. She found it necessary to examine the injured foot, upon which she laid for a moment her vital, healing touch.

"You would get on much faster if this foot could be properly treated every day, Mr. Yorke. There is not a massage rubber short of Bangor. You need one now. You have reached the stage where I should recommend it decidedly. I am sorry."

Yorke made no reply; he dared not, he was so sure that he should say something unexpected

to himself and annoying to her; and she brought the consultation to an end. As he went away she told him that she desired him to ride the next day. His ankle she thought, would bear the motion,—one of the last experiments before walking,—and he would have a driver, of course. She gave the order lightly, the means by which it was to be obeyed not being the physician's concern.

"I should like it, of all things," said Yorke, impulsively, "if I may. But it is so dull with a driver, and Mr. Butterwell is going to Bangor, you know, for several days. I don't doubt he would offer to take me, if he were here. I wish—"

"Why, I suppose I might take you," said Doctor Zay, after a scarcely perceptible pause. "I never thought of it!"

"I didn't suppose you did," said Yorke, laughing; "but I don't see why I shouldn't go,—if you won't let me bore you, that is,—do you?"

"Certainly not. I will take you with pleasure. I often take patients in the summer. It is stupid waiting. You won't find it an exciting process, I warn you. But it will be better for you than moping on the piazza. You have done enough of that."

"Quite enough, I think," said Yorke, looking fully into her upraised eyes.

"Persistent pallor!" said the doctor, in a meditative tone. "Tendency to fixed ideas. This accords with other symptoms I have noted. I must look it up carefully; but I feel pretty sure I shall give you"—her face lighted with the fervor of the symptomatologist—"I shall give you *carbo vegetabilis*!"

They rode. They rode three hours through the warmth and scent of roadside things, while the summer morning waxed indolently towards the splendid noon. Yorke bore the experiment with remarkable success. The doctor attributed this to the *carbo vegetabilis*.

She chatted cordially with him, as they drove over the long, solitary intervals that separated one call from another; or she came from a grave case to sit in the phaeton silent and distraught, and mind him no more than if he had been Handy; or a patient was responding to a difficult diagnosis or a pet theory, and she radiated her happiness upon him. He did not try to talk much. He absorbed her idly, as he did returning life and the throbbing day. He had never been beside her for so long before. He thought of that first ride through the Maine forest, and said dreamily,—

"It seems like a modern magazine serial that I should be driving with the caryatide. But I have not overtaken Atalanta. There is the Greek tragedy. No, don't turn to your note-book. I am not delirious—yet. You need not—"

"Need not what, sir?"

"Need not change the remedy. It works well."

"You speak in figures," said the woman of science, curtly. "I am a person of facts. I fail to follow you."

They called at those Baileys' who had become historic during the scarlet fever, and Yorke looked about him with vague reminiscences. The woman came to the door to welcome the doctor, extending her lean arm.

"There! it's the sign-post woman!" cried Yorke. "We owe it all to her."

"You are struggling in allegory, again. It is a case of asphyxia," said the doctor, handing him the blue reins.

"I mean, we owe it to her that I ever got to Sherman,—a precious sort of debt you think it! Your eyes laugh loud enough to be heard in Bangor. You might spare a shattered man so innocent a delusion. Science would be none the less exact for it. Hang—no, bless Mrs. Bailey! It was she who put me up to— By the way, Doctor, did you drop it by accident, or did you mean?"

"How's that leg of Bob's?" asked the doctor, in her happy soprano. She was half-way up the dreary front yard. The children ran to meet her,—a forlorn little batch,—and the woman clung to her with an uncoouth, pathetic gesture, half reverence, half fearless love. Mrs. Bailey never thought of paying a doctor's bill, but she wore new mourning for her baby. Her affection was none the less genuine for that. Doctor Zay did not grudge her the alazy alpaca.

There was a sacredness to the physician beyond the pale of enlightened social science, in the clasp of those scraggy black arms. Mrs. Bailey might outrage political economy, and retard the millennium by becoming a pauper; but she trusted her doctor, and had lost her baby.

Yorke knew little about people of this sort; he had left the lower orders of society to his mother, with a dim sense of their usefulness in providing an outlet for her superfluous sympathies. Boston women must always have an outlet. His mother kept herself supplied with several. He thought, as he sat in the phaeton waiting for this unusual young lady to exchange the society of the Baileys for his own, that she possessed a power which was far more masculine than feminine, of absorption in the immediate task. He thought it would go hard with a man to haunt her. She would shake him off for what she called objects in life, as a fine spaniel shakes off the drops after a plunge into the sea; earth is his element, after all.

Bob Bailey had cut one of the femoral muscles on a mowing-machine. The doctor etherized him, and sewed the leg up, enthusiastically. The odor of the ether permeated the fresh morning, and Yorke sickened over it in the phaeton. She came out presently, with that cool, scientific eyewhich stimulated more than it defied him.