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THE CELEBRITY

By Winston Churchill

VOLUME 2.

CHAPTER V

It was small wonder, said the knowing at Asquith, that Mr. Charles Wrexell Allen should be attracted by Irene Trevor. With the lake breezes of the north the red and the tan came into her cheeks, those boon companions of the open who are best won by the water-winds. Perhaps they brought, too, the spring to the step and the light under the long lashes when she flashed a look across the table. Little by little it became plain that Miss Trevor was gaining ground with the Celebrity to the neglect of the other young women at Asquith, and when it was announced that he was to lead the cotillon with her, the fact was regarded as significant. Even at Asquith such things were talked about. Mr. Allen became a topic and a matter of conjecture. He was, I believe, generally regarded as a good match; his unimpeachable manservant argued worldly possessions, of which other indications were not lacking, while his crest was cited as a material sign of family. Yet when Miss Brewster, one of the brace of spinsters, who hailed from Brookline and purported to be an up-to-date edition of the Boston Blue Book, questioned the Celebrity on this vital point after the searching manner warranted by the gravity of the subject, he was unable to acquit himself satisfactorily. When this conversation was repeated in detail within the hearing of the father of the young woman in question, and undoubtedly for his benefit, Mr. Trevor threw shame to the winds and scandalized the Misses Brewster then and there by proclaiming his father to have been a country storekeeper. In the eyes of Mr. Farquhar Fenelon Cooke the apotheosis of the Celebrity was complete. The people of Asquith were not only willing to attend the house-warming, but had been worked up to the pitch of eagerness. The Celebrity as a matter of course was master of ceremonies. He originated the figures and arranged the couples, of which there were twelve from Asquith and ten

additional young women. These ten were assigned to the ten young men whom Mr. Cooke expected in his private car, and whose appearances, heights, and temperaments the Celebrity obtained from Mr. Cooke, carefully noted, and compared with those of the young women. Be it said in passing that Mrs. Cooke had nothing to do with any of it, but exhibited an almost criminal indifference. Mr. Cooke had even chosen the favors; charity forbids that I should say what they were.

Owing to the frequent consultations which these preparations made necessary the Celebrity was much in the company of my client, which he came greatly to prefer to mine, and I therefore abandoned my determination to leave Asquith. I was settling down delightedly to my old, easy, and unmolested existence when Farrar and I received an invitation, which amounted to a summons, to go to Mohair and make ourselves generally useful. So we packed up and went. We made an odd party before the arrival of the Ten, particularly when the Celebrity dropped in for lunch or dinner. He could not be induced to remain permanently at Mohair because Miss Trevor was at Asquith, but he appropriated a Hempstead cart from the Mohair stables and made the trip sometimes twice in a day. The fact that Mrs. Cooke treated him with unqualified disapproval did not dampen his spirits or lessen the frequency of his visits, nor, indeed, did it seem to create any breach between husband and wife. Mr. Cooke took it for granted that his friends should not please his wife, and Mrs. Cooke remarked to Farrar and me that her husband was old enough to know better, and too old to be taught. She loved him devotedly and showed it in a hundred ways, but she was absolutely incapable of dissimulation.

Thanks to Mrs. Cooke, our visit to Mohair was a pleasant one. We were able in many ways to help in the arrangements, especially Farrar, who had charge of decorating the grounds. We saw but little of Mr. Cooke and the Celebrity.

The arrival of the Ten was an event of importance, and occurred the day of the dance. I shall treat the Ten as a whole because they did not materially differ from one another in dress or habits or ambition or general usefulness on this earth. It is true that Mr. Cooke had been able to make delicate distinctions between them for the aid of the Celebrity, but such distinctions were beyond me, and the power to make them lay only in a long and careful study of the species which I could not afford to give. Likewise the life of any one of the Ten was the life of all, and might be truthfully represented by a single year, since each year was exactly like the preceding. The ordinary year, as is well-known, begins on the first of January. But theirs was not the ordinary year, nor the Church year, nor the fiscal year. Theirs began in the Fall with the New York Horse Show. And I am of the opinion, though open to correction, that they dated from the first Horse Show instead of from the birth of Christ. It is certain that they were much better versed in the history of the Association than in that of the Union, in the biography of Excelsior rather than that of Lincoln. The Dog Show was another event to which they looked forward, when they migrated to New York and put up at the country places of their friends. But why go farther?

The Ten made themselves very much at home at Mohair. One of them told the Celebrity he reminded him very much of a man he had met in New York and who had written a book, or something of that sort, which made the Celebrity wince. The afternoon was spent in one of the stable lofts, where Mr. Cooke had set up a mysterious L-shaped box, in one arm of which a badger was placed by a groom, while my client's Sarah, a terrier, was sent into the other arm to invite the badger out. His objections exceeded the highest hopes; he dug his claws into the wood and devoted himself to Sarah's countenance with unremitting industry. This occupation was found so absorbing that it was with difficulty the Ten were induced to abandon it and dress for an early dinner, and only did so after the second peremptory message from Mrs. Cooke.

"It's always this way," said Mr. Cooke, regretfully, as he watched Sarah licking the accessible furrows in her face; "I never started in on anything worth doing yet that Maria did not stop it."

Farrar and I were not available for the dance, and after dinner we looked about for a quiet spot in which to weather it, and where we could be within reach if needed. Such a place as this was the Florentine galleried porch, which ran along outside the upper windows of the ball-room; these were flung open, for the night was warm. At one end of the room the musicians, imported from Minneapolis by Mr. Cooke, were striking the first discordant notes of the tuning, while at the other the Celebrity and my client, in scarlet hunting-coats, were gravely instructing the Ten, likewise in scarlet hunting-coats, as to their conduct and functions. We were reviewing these interesting proceedings when Mrs. Cooke came hurrying towards us. She held a letter in her hand.

"You know," said she, "that Mr. Cooke is forgetful, particularly when his mind is occupied with important matters, as it has been for some time. Here is a letter from my niece, Miss Thorn, which he has carried in his pocket since Monday. We expected her two weeks ago, and had given her up. But it seems she was to leave Philadelphia on Wednesday, and will be at that forlorn little station of Asquith at half-past nine to-night. I want you two to go over and meet her."

We expressed our readiness, and in ten minutes were in the station wagon, rolling rapidly down the

long drive, for it was then after nine. We passed on the way the van of the guests from Asquith. As we reached the lodge we heard the whistle, and we backed up against one side of the platform as the train pulled up at the other.

Farrar and I are not imaginative; we did not picture to ourselves any particular type for the girl we were going to meet, we were simply doing our best to get to the station before the train. We jumped from the wagon and were watching the people file out of the car, and I noticed that more than one paused to look back over their shoulders as they reached the door. Then came a maid with hand-bag and shawls, and after her a tall young lady. She stood for a moment holding her skirt above the grimy steps, with something of the stately pose which Richter has given his Queen Louise on the stairway, and the light of the reflector fell full upon her. She looked around expectantly, and recognizing Mrs. Cooke's maid, who had stepped forward to relieve hers of the shawls, Miss Thorn greeted her with a smile which greatly prepossessed us in her favor.

"How do you do, Jennie?" she said. "Did any one else come?"

"Yes, Miss Marian," replied Jennie, abashed but pleased,— "these gentlemen."

Farrar and I introduced ourselves, awkwardly enough, and we both tried to explain at once how it was that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Cooke was there to meet her. Of course we made an absolute failure of it. She scanned our faces with a puzzled expression for a while and then broke into a laugh.

"I think I understand," she said; "they are having the house-warming."

"She's first-rate at guessing," said Farrar to me as we fled precipitately to see that the trunks were hoisted into the basket. Neither of us had much presence of mind as we climbed into the wagon, and, what was even stranger, could not account for the lack of it. Miss Thorn was seated in the corner; in spite of the darkness I could see that she was laughing at us still.

"I feel very badly that I should have taken you away from the dance," we heard her say.

"We don't dance," I answered clumsily, "and we were glad to come."

"Yes, we were glad to come," Farrar chimed in.

Then we relapsed into a discomfited silence, and wished we were anywhere else. But Miss Thorn relieved the situation by laughing aloud, and with such a hearty enjoyment that instead of getting angry and more mortified we began to laugh ourselves, and instantly felt better. After that we got along famously. She had at once the air of good fellowship and the dignity of a woman, and she seemed to understand Farrar and me perfectly. Not once did she take us over our heads, though she might have done so with ease, and we knew this and were thankful. We began to tell her about Mohair and the cotillon, and of our point of observation from the Florentine galleried porch, and she insisted she would join us there. By the time we reached the house we were thanking our stars she had come. Mrs. Cooke came out under the port-cochere to welcome her.

"Unfortunately there is no one to dance with you, Marian," she said; "but if I had not by chance gone through your uncle's pockets, there would have been no one to meet you."

I think I had never felt my deficiency in dancing until that moment. But Miss Thorn took her aunt's hand affectionately in hers.

"My dear Aunt Maria," said she, "I would not dance to-night if there were twenty to choose from. I should like nothing better than to look on with these two. We are the best of friends already," she added, turning towards us, "are we not?"

"We are indeed," we hastened to assure her.

Mrs. Cooke smiled.

"You should have been a man, Marian," she said as they went upstairs together.

We made our way to the galleried porch and sat down, there being a lull in the figures just then. We each took out a cigar and lighted a match; and then looked across at the other. We solemnly blew our matches out.

"Perhaps she doesn't like smoke," said Farrar, voicing the sentiment.

"Perhaps not," said I.

Silence.

"I wonder how she will get along with the Ten?" I queried.

"Better than with us," he answered in his usual strain. "They're trained."

"Or with Allen?" I added irresistibly.

"Women are all alike," said Farrar.

At this juncture Miss Thorn herself appeared at the end of the gallery, her shoulders wrapped in a gray cape trimmed with fur. She stood regarding us with some amusement as we rose to receive her.

"Light your cigars and be sensible," said she, "or I shall go in."

We obeyed. The three of us turned to the window to watch the figure, the music of which was just beginning. Mr. Cooke, with the air of an English squire at his own hunt ball, was strutting contentedly up and down one end of the room, now pausing to exchange a few hearty words with some Presbyterian matron from Asquith, now to congratulate Mr. Trevor on the appearance of his daughter. Lined against the opposite wall were the Celebrity and his ten red-coated followers, just rising for the figure. It was very plain that Miss Trevor was radiantly happy; she was easily the handsomest girl in the room, and I could not help philosophizing when I saw her looking up into the Celebrity's eyes upon the seeming inconsistency of nature, who has armed and warned woman against all but her most dangerous enemy.

And then a curious thing happened. The Celebrity, as if moved by a sudden uncontrollable impulse, raised his eyes until they rested on the window in which we were. Although his dancing was perfect, he lost the step without apparent cause, his expression changed, and for the moment he seemed to be utterly confused. But only for the moment; in a trice he had caught the time again and swept Miss Trevor rapidly down the room and out of sight. I looked instinctively at the girl beside me. She had thrown her head forward, and in the streaming light I saw that her lips were parted in a smile.

I resolved upon a stroke.

"Mr. Allen," I remarked, "leads admirably."

"Mr. Allen!" she exclaimed, turning on me.

"Yes, it is Mr. Allen who is leading," I repeated.

An expression of perplexity spread over her face, but she said nothing. My curiosity was aroused to a high pitch, and questions were rising to my lips which I repressed with difficulty. For Miss Thorn had displayed, purposely or not, a reticence which my short acquaintance with her compelled me to respect; and, besides, I was bound by a promise not to betray the Celebrity's secret. I was, however, convinced from what had occurred that she had met the Celebrity in the East, and perhaps known him.

Had she fallen in love with him, as was the common fate of all young women he met? I changed my opinion on this subject a dozen times. Now I was sure, as I looked at her, that she was far too sensible; again, a doubt would cross my mind as the Celebrity himself would cross my view, the girl on his arm reduced to adoration. I followed him narrowly when in sight. Miss Thorn was watching him, too, her eyes half closed, as though in thought. But beyond the fact that he threw himself into the dance with a somewhat increased fervor, perhaps, his manner betokened no uneasiness, and not even by a glance did he betray any disturbing influence from above.

Thus we stood silently until the figure was finished, when Miss Thorn seated herself in one of the wicker chairs behind us.

"Doesn't it make you wish to dance?" said Farrar to her. "It is hard luck you should be doomed to spend the evening with two such useless fellows as we are."

She did not catch his remark at first, as was natural in a person preoccupied. Then she bit her lips to repress a smile.

"I assure you, Mr. Farrar," she said with force, "I have never in my life wished to dance as little as I do now."

But a voice interrupted her, and the scarlet coat of the Celebrity was thrust into the light between us. Farrar excused himself abruptly and disappeared.

"Never wished to dance less!" cried the Celebrity. "Upon my word, Miss Thorn, that's too bad. I came up to ask you to reconsider your determination, as one of the girls from Asquith is leaving, and there is an extra man."

"You are very kind," said Miss Thorn, quietly, "but I prefer to remain here."

My surmise, then, was correct. She had evidently met the Celebrity, and there was that in his manner of addressing her, without any formal greeting, which seemed to point to a close acquaintance.

"You know Mr. Allen, then, Miss Thorn?" said I.

"What can you mean?" she exclaimed, wheeling on me; "this is not Mr. Allen."

"Hang you, Crocker," the Celebrity put in impatiently; "Miss Thorn knows who I am as well as you do."

"I confess it is a little puzzling," said she; "perhaps it is because I am tired from travelling, and my brain refuses to work. But why in the name of all that is strange do you call him Mr. Allen?"

The Celebrity threw himself into the chair beside her and asked permission to light a cigarette.

"I am going to ask you the favor of respecting my incognito, Miss Thorn, as Crocker has done," he said. "Crocker knew me in the East, too. I had not counted upon finding him at Asquith."

Miss Thorn straightened herself and made a gesture of impatience.

"An incognito!" she cried. "But you have taken another man's name. And you already had his face and figure!"

I jumped.

"That is so," he calmly returned; "the name was ready to hand, and so I took it. I don't imagine it will make any difference to him. It's only a whim of mine, and with me there's no accounting for a whim. I make it a point to gratify every one that strikes me. I confess to being eccentric, you know."

"You must get an enormous amount of gratification out of this," she said dryly. "What if the other man should happen along?"

"Scarcely at Asquith."

"I have known stranger things to occur," said she.

The Celebrity smiled and smoked.

"I'll wager, now," he went on, "that you little thought to find me here incognito. But it is delicious, I assure you, to lead once more a commonplace and unmolested existence."

"Delightful," said Miss Thorn.

"People never consider an author apart from his work, you know, and I confess I had a desire to find out how I would get along. And there comes a time when a man wishes he had never written a book, and a longing to be sought after for his own sake and to be judged on his own merits. And then it is a great relief to feel that one is not at the beck and call of any one and every one wherever one goes, and to know that one is free to choose one's own companions and do as one wishes."

"The sentiment is good," Miss Thorn agreed, "very good. But doesn't it seem a little odd, Mr. Crocker," she continued, appealing to me, "that a man should take the pains to advertise a trip to Europe in order to gratify a whim of this sort?"

"It is indeed incomprehensible to me," I replied, with a kind of grim pleasure, "but you must remember that I have always led a commonplace existence."

Although the Celebrity was almost impervious to sarcasm, he was now beginning to exhibit visible signs of uneasiness, the consciousness dawning upon him that his eccentricity was not receiving the ovation it merited. It was with a palpable relief that he heard the first warning notes of the figure.

"Am I to understand that you wish me to do my part in concealing your identity?" asked Miss Thorn, cutting him short as he was expressing pleasure at her arrival.

"If you will be so kind," he answered, and departed with a bow. There was a mischievous mirth in her eye as she took her place in the window. Below in the ball-room sat Miss Trevor surrounded by men, and I saw her face lighting at the Celebrity's approach.

"Who is that beautiful girl he is dancing with?" said Miss Thorn.

I told her.

"Have you read his books?" she asked, after a pause.

"Some of them."

"So have I."

The Celebrity was not mentioned again that evening.

CHAPTER VI

As an endeavor to unite Mohair and Asquith the cotillon had proved a dismal failure. They were as the clay and the brass. The next morning Asquith was split into factions and rent by civil strife, and the porch of the inn was covered by little knots of women, all trying to talk at once; their faces told an ominous tale. Not a man was to be seen. The Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Chicago papers, all of which had previously contained elaborate illustrated accounts of Mr. Cooke's palatial park and residence, came out that morning bristling with headlines about the ball, incidentally holding up the residents of a quiet and retiring little community in a light that scandalized them beyond measure. And Mr. Charles Wrexell Allen, treasurer of the widely known Miles Standish Bicycle Company, was said to have led the cotillon in a manner that left nothing to be desired.

So it was this gentleman whom the Celebrity was personating! A queer whim indeed.

After that, I doubt if the court of Charles the Second was regarded by the Puritans with a greater abhorrence than was Mohair by the good ladies of Asquith. Mr. Cooke and his ten friends were branded as profligates whose very scarlet coats bore witness that they were of the devil. Mr. Cooke himself, who particularly savored of brimstone, would much better have remained behind the arras, for he was denounced with such energy and bitterness that those who might have attempted his defence were silent, and their very silence told against them. Mr. Cooke had indeed outdone himself in hospitality. He had posted punch-bowls in every available corner, and so industriously did he devote himself to the duties of host, as he conceived them, that as many as four of the patriarchs of Asquith and pillars of the church had returned home more or less insensible, while others were quite incoherent. The odds being overwhelming, the master of Mohair had at length fallen a victim to his own good cheer. He took post with Judge Short at the foot of the stair, where, in spite of the protests of the Celebrity and of other well-disposed persons, the two favored the parting guests with an occasional impromptu song and waved genial good-byes to the ladies. And, when Mrs. Short attempted to walk by with her head in the air, as though the judge were in an adjoining county, he so far forgot his judicial dignity as to chuck her under the chin, an act which was applauded with much boyish delight by Mr. Cooke, and a remark which it is just as well not to repeat. The judge desired to spend the night at Mohair, but was afterwards taken home by main force, and the next day his meals were brought up to him. It is small wonder that Mrs. Short was looked upon as the head of the outraged party. The Ten were only spoken of in whispers. Three of them had been unable to come to time when the last figure was called, whereupon their partners were whisked off the scene without so much as being allowed to pay their respects to the hostess. Besides these offences, there were other minor barbarisms too numerous to mention.

Although Mrs. Short's party was all-powerful at Asquith, there were some who, for various reasons, refused to agree in the condemnation of Mr. Cooke. Judge Short and the other gentlemen in his position were, of course, restricted, but Mr. Trevor came out boldly in the face of severe criticism and declared that his daughter should accept any invitation from Mrs. Cooke that she chose, and paid but little attention to the coolness resulting therefrom. He was fast getting a reputation for oddity. And the Celebrity tried to conciliate both parties, and succeeded, though none but he could have done it. At first he was eyed with suspicion and disgust as he drove off to Mohair in his Hempstead cart, and was called many hard names. But he had a way about him which won them in the end.

A few days later I ran over to Mohair and found my client with the colored Sunday supplement of a Chicago newspaper spread out before him, eyeing the page with something akin to childish delight. I discovered that it was a picture of his own hunt ball, and as a bit of color it was marvellous, the scarlet coats being very much in evidence.

"There, old man!" he exclaimed. "What do you think of that? Something of a sendoff, eh?" And he pointed to a rather stout and important gentleman in the foreground. "That's me!" he said proudly, "and they wouldn't do that for Farquhar Fenelon Cooke in Philadelphia."

"A prophet is without honor in his own country," I remarked.

"I don't set up for a prophet," said Mr. Cooke, "but I did predict that I would start a ripple here, didn't I?"

I did not deny this.

"How do I stand over there?" he inquired, designating Asquith by a twist of the head. "I hear they're acting all over the road; that they think I'm the very devil."

"Well, your stock has dropped some, I admit," I answered. "They didn't take kindly to your getting the judge drunk, you know."

"They oughtn't to complain about that," said my client; "and besides, he wasn't drunk enough to amount to anything."

"However that may be," said I, "you have the credit for leading him astray. But there is a split in your favor."

"I'm glad to know that," he said, brightening; "then I won't have to import any more."

"Any more what?" I asked.

"People from the East to keep things moving, of course. What I have here and those left me at the inn ought to be enough to run through the summer with. Don't you think so?"

I thought so, and was moving off when he called me back.

"Is the judge locked up, old man?" he demanded.

"He's under rather close surveillance," I replied, smiling.

"Crocker," he said confidentially, "see if you can't smuggle him over here some day soon. The judge always holds good cards, and plays a number one hand."

I promised, and escaped. On the veranda I came upon Miss Thorn surrounded by some of her uncle's guests. I imagine that she was bored, for she looked it.

"Mr. Crocker," she called out, "you're just the man I have been wishing to see."

The others naturally took this for a dismissal, and she was not long in coming to her point when we were alone.

"What is it you know about this queer but gifted genius who is here so mysteriously?" she asked.

"Nothing whatever," I confessed. "I knew him before he thought of becoming a genius."

"Retrogression is always painful," she said; "but tell me something about him then."

I told her all I knew, being that narrated in these pages. "Now," said I, "if you will pardon a curiosity on my part, from what you said the other evening I inferred that he closely resembles the man whose name it pleased him to assume. And that man, I learn from the newspapers, is Mr. Charles Wrexell Allen of the 'Miles Standish Bicycle Company.'"

Miss Thorn made a comic gesture of despair.

"Why he chose Mr. Allen's name," she said, "is absolutely beyond my guessing. Unless there is some purpose behind the choice, which I do not for an instant believe, it was a foolish thing to do, and one very apt to lead to difficulties. I can understand the rest. He has a reputation for eccentricity which he feels he must keep up, and this notion of assuming a name evidently appealed to him as an inspiration."

"But why did he come out here?" I asked. "Can you tell me that?"

Miss Thorn flushed slightly, and ignored the question.

"I met the 'Celebrity,' as you call him," she said, "for the first time last winter, and I saw him frequently during the season. Of course I had heard not a little about him and his peculiarities. His

name seems to have gone the length and breadth of the land. And, like most girls, I had read his books and confess I enjoyed them. It is not too much to say," she added archly, "that I made a sort of archangel out of the author."

"I can understand that," said I.

"But that did not last," she continued hastily. "I see I have got beside my story. I saw a great deal of him in New York. He came to call, and I believe I danced with him once or twice. And then my aunt, Mrs. Rivers, bought a place near Epsom, in Massachusetts, and had a house party there in May. And the Celebrity was invited."

I smiled.

"Oh, I assure you it was a mere chance," said Miss Thorn. "I mention this that I may tell you the astonishing part of it all. Epsom is one of those smoky manufacturing towns one sees in New England, and the 'Miles Standish' bicycle is made there. The day after we all arrived at my aunt's a man came up the drive on a wheel whom I greeted in a friendly way and got a decidedly uncertain bow in return.

"I thought it rather a strange shift from a marked cordiality, and spoke of the circumstance to my aunt, who was highly amused. 'Why, my dear,' said she, 'that was Mr. Allen, of the bicycle company. I was nearly deceived myself.'"

"And is the resemblance so close as that?" I exclaimed.

"So close! Believe me, they are as like as two ices from a mould. Of course, when they are together one can distinguish the Celebrity from the bicycle man. The Celebrity's chin is a little more square, and his nose straighter, and there are other little differences. I believe Mr. Allen has a slight scar on his forehead. But the likeness was remarkable, nevertheless, and it grew to be a standing joke with us. They actually dressed ludicrously alike. The Celebrity became so sensitive about it that he went back to New York before the party broke up. We grew to be quite fond of the bicycle man."

She paused and shifted her chair, which had rocked close to mine.

"And can you account for his coming to Asquith?" I asked innocently.

She was plainly embarrassed.

"I suppose I might account for it, Mr. Crocker," she replied. Then she added, with something of an impulse, "After all, it is foolish of me not to tell you. You probably know the Celebrity well enough to have learned that he takes idiotic fancies to young women."

"Not always idiotic," I protested.

"You mean that the young women are not always idiotic, I suppose. No, not always, but nearly always. I imagine he got the idea of coming to Asquith," she went on with a change of manner, "because I chanced to mention that I was coming out here on a visit."

"Oh," I remarked, and there words failed me.

Her mouth was twitching with merriment.

"I am afraid you will have to solve the rest of it for yourself, Mr. Crocker," said she; "that is all of my contribution. My uncle tells me you are the best lawyer in the country, and I am surprised that you are so slow in getting at motives."

And I did attempt to solve it on my way back to Asquith. The conclusion I settled to, everything weighed, was this: that the Celebrity had become infatuated with Miss Thorn (I was far from blaming him for that) and had followed her first to Epsom and now to Asquith. And he had chosen to come West incognito partly through the conceit which he admitted and gloried in, and partly because he believed his prominence sufficient to obtain for him an unpleasant notoriety if he continued long enough to track the same young lady about the country. Hence he had taken the trouble to advertise a trip abroad to account for his absence. Undoubtedly his previous conquests had been made more easily, for my second talk with Miss Thorn had put my mind at rest as to her having fallen a victim to his fascinations. Her arrival at Mohair being delayed, the Celebrity had come nearly a month too soon, and in the interval that tendency of which he was the dupe still led him by the nose; he must needs make violent love to the most attractive girl on the ground,—Miss Trevor. Now that one still more attractive had arrived I was curious to see how he would steer between the two, for I made no doubt that matters had progressed rather far with Miss Trevor. And in this I was not mistaken.

But his choice of the name of Charles Wrexell Allen bothered me considerably. I finally decided that he had taken it because convenient, and because he believed Asquith to be more remote from the East than the Sandwich Islands.

Reaching the inn grounds, I climbed the hillside to a favorite haunt of mine, a huge boulder having a sloping back covered with soft turf. Hence I could watch indifferently both lake and sky. Presently, however, I was aroused by voices at the foot of the rock, and peering over the edge I discovered a kind of sewing-circle gathered there. The foliage hid me completely. I perceived the Celebrity perched upon the low branch of an apple-tree, and Miss Trevor below him, with two other girls, doing fancy-work. I shall not attempt to defend the morality of my action, but I could not get away without discovery, and the knowledge that I had heard a part of their conversation might prove disquieting to them.

The Celebrity had just published a book, under the title of 'The Sybarites', which was being everywhere discussed; and Asquith, where summer reading was general, came in for its share of the debate. Why it was called The Sybarites I have never discovered. I did not read the book because I was sick and tired of the author and his nonsense, but I imbibed, in spite of myself, something of the story and its moral from hearing it talked about. The Celebrity himself had listened to arguments on the subject with great serenity, and was nothing loth to give his opinion when appealed to. I realized at once that 'The Sybarites' was the present topic.

"Yes, it is rather an uncommon book," he was saying languidly, "but there is no use writing a story unless it is uncommon."

"Dear, how I should like to meet the author!" exclaimed a voice. "He must be a charming man, and so young, too! I believe you said you knew him, Mr. Allen."

"An old acquaintance," he answered, "and I am always reminding him that his work is overestimated."

"How can you say he is overestimated!" said a voice.

"You men are all jealous of him," said another.

"Is he handsome? I have heard he is."

"He would scarcely be called so," said the Celebrity, doubtfully.

"He is, girls," Miss Trevor interposed; "I have seen his photograph."

"What does he look like, Irene?" they chorused. "Men are no judges."

"He is tall, and dark, and broad-shouldered," Miss Trevor enumerated, as though counting her stitches, "and he has a very firm chin, and a straight nose, and—"

"Perfect!" they cried. "I had an idea he was just like that. I should go wild about him. Does he talk as well as he writes, Mr. Allen?"

"That is admitting that he writes well."

"Admitting?" they shouted scornfully, "and don't you admit it?"

"Some people like his writing, I have to confess," said the Celebrity, with becoming calmness; "certainly his personality could not sell an edition of thirty thousand in a month. I think 'The Sybarites' the best of his works."

"Upon my word, Mr. Allen, I am disgusted with you," said the second voice; "I have not found a man yet who would speak a good word for him. But I did not think it of you."

A woman's tongue, like a firearm, is a dangerous weapon, and often strikes where it is least expected. I saw with a wicked delight that the shot had told, for the Celebrity blushed to the roots of his hair, while Miss Trevor dropped three or four stitches.

"I do not see how you can expect men to like 'The Sybarites'," she said, with some heat; "very few men realize or care to realize what a small chance the average woman has. I know marriage isn't a necessary goal, but most women, as well as most men, look forward to it at some time of life, and, as a rule, a woman is forced to take her choice of the two or three men that offer themselves, no matter what they are. I admire a man who takes up the cudgels for women, as he has done."

"Of course we admire him," they cried, as soon as Miss Trevor had stopped for breath.

"And can you expect a man to like a book which admits that women are the more constant?" she went

on.

"Why, Irene, you are quite rabid on the subject," said the second voice; "I did not say I expected it. I only said I had hoped to find Mr. Allen, at least, broad enough to agree with the book."

"Doesn't Mr. Allen remind you a little of Desmond?" asked the first voice, evidently anxious to avoid trouble.

"Do you know whom he took for Desmond, Mr. Allen? I have an idea it was himself."

Mr. Allen, had now recovered some of his composure.

"If so, it was done unconsciously," he said. "I suppose an author must put his best thoughts in the mouth of his hero."

"But it is like him?" she insisted.

"Yes, he holds the same views."

"Which you do not agree with."

"I have not said I did not agree with them," he replied, taking up his own defence; "the point is not that men are more inconstant than women, but that women have more excuse for inconstancy. If I remember correctly, Desmond, in a letter to Rosamond, says: 'Inconstancy in a woman, because of the present social conditions, is often pardonable. In a man, nothing is more despicable.' I think that is so. I believe that a man should stick by the woman to whom he has given his word as closely as he sticks by his friends."

"Ah!" exclaimed the aggressive second voice, "that is all very well. But how about the woman to whom he has not given his word? Unfortunately, the present social conditions allow a man to go pretty far without a definite statement."

At this I could not refrain from looking at Miss Trevor. She was bending over her knitting and had broken her thread.

"It is presumption for a man to speak without some foundation," said the Celebrity, "and wrong unless he is sure of himself."

"But you must admit," the second voice continued, "that a man has no right to amuse himself with a woman, and give her every reason to believe he is going to marry her save the only manly and substantial one. And yet that is something which happens every day. What do you think of a man who deserts a woman under those conditions?"

"He is a detestable dog, of course," declared the Celebrity.

And the cock in the inn yard was silent.

"I should love to be able to quote from a book at will," said the quieting voice, for the sake of putting an end to an argument which bid fair to become disagreeable. "How do you manage to do it?"

"It was simply a passage that stuck in my mind," he answered modestly; "when I read a book I pick them up just as a roller picks up a sod here and there as it moves over the lawn."

"I should think you might write, Mr. Allen, you have such an original way of putting things!"

"I have thought of it," returned the Celebrity, "and I may, some fine day."

Wherewith he thrust his hands into his pockets and sauntered off with equanimity undisturbed, apparently unaware of the impression he had left behind him. And the Fifth Reader story popped into my head of good King William (or King Frederick, I forgot which), who had a royal fancy for laying aside the gayeties of the court and straying incognito among his plainer subjects, but whose princely origin was invariably detected in spite of any disguise his Majesty could invent.

CHAPTER VII

I experienced a great surprise a few mornings afterwards. I had risen quite early, and found the Celebrity's man superintending the hoisting of luggage on top of a van.

"Is your master leaving?" I asked.

"He's off to Mohair now, sir," said the valet, with a salute.

At that instant the Celebrity himself appeared.

"Yes, old chap, I'm off to Mohair," he explained. "There's more sport in a day up there than you get here in a season. Beastly slow place, this, unless one is a deacon or a doctor of divinity. Why don't you come up, Crocker? Cooke would like nothing better; he has told me so a dozen times."

"He is very good," I replied. I could not resist the temptation to add, "I had an idea Asquith rather suited your purposes just now."

"I don't quite understand," he said, jumping at the other half of my meaning.

"Oh, nothing. But you told me when you came here, if I am not mistaken, that you chose Asquith because of those very qualities for which you now condemn it."

"Magna est vis consuetudinis," he laughed; "I thought I could stand the life, but I can't. I am tired of their sects and synods and sermons. By the way," said he pulling at my sleeve, "what a deuced pretty girl that Miss Thorn is! Isn't she? Rollins, where's the cart? Well, good-bye, Crocker; see you soon."

He drove rapidly off as the clock struck six, and an uneasy glance he gave the upper windows did not escape me. When Farrar appeared, I told him what had happened.

"Good riddance," he replied sententiously.

We sat in silence until the bell rang, looking at the morning sun on the lake. I was a little anxious to learn the state of Farrar's feelings in regard to Miss Trevor, and how this new twist in affairs had affected them. But I might as well have expected one of King Louis's carp to whisper secrets of the old regime. The young lady came to the breakfast-table looking so fresh and in such high spirits that I made sure she had not heard of the Celebrity's ignoble escape. As the meal proceeded it was easy to mark that her eye now and again fell across his empty chair, and glanced inquiringly towards the door. I made up my mind that I would not be the bearer of evil news, and so did Farrar, so we kept up a vapid small-talk with Mr. Trevor on the condition of trade in the West. Miss Trevor, however, in some way came to suspect that we could account for that vacant seat. At last she fixed her eye inquiringly on me, and I trembled.

"Mr. Crocker," she began, and paused. Then she added with a fair unconcern, "do you happen to know where Mr. Allen is this morning?"

"He has gone over to Mohair, I believe," I replied weakly.

"To Mohair!" she exclaimed, putting down her cup; "why, he promised to go canoeing at ten."

"Probably he will be back by then," I ventured, not finding it in my heart to tell her the cruel truth. But I kept my eyes on my plate. They say a lie has short legs. Mine had, for my black friend, Simpson, was at that instant taking off the fruit, and overheard my remark.

"Mr. Allen done gone for good," he put in, "done give me five dollars last night. Why, sah," he added, scratching his head, "you was on de poch dis mornin' when his trunks was took away!"

It was certainly no time to quibble then.

"His trunks!" Miss Trevor exclaimed.

"Yes, he has left us and gone to Mohair," I said, "bag and baggage. That is the flat truth of it."

I suppose there is some general rule for calculating beforehand how a young woman is going to act when news of this sort is broken. I had no notion of what Miss Trevor would do. I believe Farrar thought she would faint, for he laid his napkin on the table. She did nothing of the kind, but said simply:

"How unreliable men are!"

I fell to guessing what her feelings were; for the life of me I could not tell from her face. I was sorry for Miss Trevor in spite of the fact that she had neglected to ask my advice before falling in love with the Celebrity. I asked her to go canoeing with me. She refused kindly but very firmly.

It is needless to say that the Celebrity did not come back to the inn, and as far as I could see the desertion was designed, cold-blooded, and complete. Miss Trevor remained out of sight during the day of his departure, and at dinner we noticed traces of a storm about her,—a storm which had come and gone. There was an involuntary hush as she entered the dining-room, for Asquith had been buzzing that afternoon over the episode. And I admired the manner in which she bore her inspection. Already rumors of the cause of Mr. Allen's departure were in active circulation, and I was astonished to learn that he had been seen that day seated upon Indian rock with Miss Thorn herself. This piece of news gave me a feeling of insecurity about people, and about women in particular, that I had never before experienced. After holding the Celebrity up to such unmeasured ridicule as she had done, ridicule not without a seasoning of contempt, it was difficult to believe Miss Thorn so inconsistent as to go alone with him to Indian rock; and she was not ignorant of Miss Trevor's experience. But the fact was attested by trustworthy persons.

I have often wondered what prompted me to ask Miss Trevor again to go canoeing. To do myself justice, it was no wish of mine to meddle with or pry into her affairs. Neither did I flatter myself that my poor company would be any consolation for that she had lost. I shall not try to analyze my motive. Suffice it to record that she accepted this second invitation, and I did my best to amuse her by relating a few of my experiences at the bar, and I told that memorable story of Farrar throwing O'Meara into the street. We were getting along famously, when we descried another canoe passing us at some distance, and we both recognized the Celebrity at the paddle by the flannel jacket of his college boat club. And Miss Thorn sat in the bow!

"Do you know anything about that man, Miss Trevor?" I asked abruptly.

She grew scarlet, but replied:

"I know that he is a fraud."

"Anything else?"

"I can't say that I do; that is, nothing but what he has told me."

"If you will forgive my curiosity," I said, "what has he told you?"

"He says he is the author of *The Sybarites*," she answered, her lip curling, "but of course I do not believe that, now."

"But that happens to be true," I said, smiling.

She clapped her hands.

"I promised him I wouldn't tell," she cried, "but the minute I get back to the inn I shall publish it."

"No, don't do that just yet," said I.

"Why not? Of course I shall."

I had no definite reason, only a vague hope that we should get some better sort of enjoyment out of the disclosure before the summer was over.

"You see," I said, "he is always getting into scrapes; he is that kind of a man. And it is my humble opinion that he has put his head into a noose this time, for sure. Mr. Allen, of the 'Miles Standish Bicycle Company,' whose name he has borrowed for the occasion, is enough like him in appearance to be his twin brother."

"He has borrowed another man's name!" she exclaimed; "why, that's stealing!"

"No, merely kleptomania," I replied; "he wouldn't be the other man if he could. But it has struck me that the real Mr. Allen might turn up here, or some friend of his, and stir things a bit. My advice to you is to keep quiet, and we may have a comedy worth seeing."

"Well," she remarked, after she had got over a little of her astonishment, "it would be great fun to tell, but I won't if you say so."

I came to, have a real liking for Miss Trevor. Farrar used to smile when I spoke of this, and I never could induce him to go out with us in the canoe, which we did frequently,—in fact, every day I was at Asquith, except of course Sundays. And we grew to understand each other very well. She looked upon me in the same light as did my other friends,—that of a counsellor-at-law,—and I fell unconsciously into the role of her adviser, in which capacity I was the recipient of many confidences I would have got in no other way. That is, in no other way save one, and in that I had no desire to go, even had it been

possible. Miss Trevor was only nineteen, and in her eyes I was at least sixty.

"See here, Miss Trevor," I said to her one day after we had become more or less intimate, "of course it's none of my business, but you didn't feel very badly after the Celebrity went away, did you?"

Her reply was frank and rather staggering.

"Yes, I did. I was engaged to him, you know."

"Engaged to him! I had no idea he ever got that far," I exclaimed.

Miss Trevor laughed merrily.

"It was my fault," she said; "I pinned him down, and he had to propose. There was no way out of it. I don't mind telling you."

I did not know whether to be flattered or aggrieved by this avowal.

"You know," she went on, her tone half apologetic, "the day after he came he told me who he was, and I wanted to stop the people we passed and inform them of the lion I was walking with. And I was quite carried away by the honor of his attentions: any girl would have been, you know."

"I suppose so," I assented.

"And I had heard and read so much of him, and I doted on his stories, and all that. His heroes are divine, you must admit. And, Mr. Crocker," she concluded with a charming naivety, "I just made up my mind I would have him."

"Woman proposes, and man disposes," I laughed. "He escaped in spite of you."

She looked at me queerly.

"Only a jest," I said hurriedly; "your escape is the one to be thankful for. You might have married him, like the young woman in *The Sybarites*. You remember, do you not, that the hero of that book sacrifices himself for the lady who adores him, but whom he has ceased to adore?"

"Yes, I remember," she laughed; "I believe I know that book by heart."

"Think of the countless girls he must have relieved of their affections before their eyes were opened," I continued with mock gravity. "Think of the charred trail he has left behind him. A man of that sort ought to be put under heavy bonds not to break any more hearts. But a kleptomaniac isn't responsible, you understand. And it isn't worth while to bear any malice."

"Oh, I don't bear any malice now," she said. "I did at first, naturally. But it all seems very ridiculous now I have had time to think it over. I believe, Mr. Crocker, that I never really cared for him."

"Simply an idol shattered this time," I suggested, "and not a heart broken."

"Yes, that's it," said she.

"I am glad to hear it," said I, much pleased that she had taken such a sensible view. "But you are engaged to him."

"I was."

"You have broken the engagement, then?"

"No, I—haven't," she said.

"Then he has broken it?"

She did not appear to resent this catechism.

"That's the strange part of it," said Miss Trevor, "he hasn't even thought it necessary."

"It is clear, then, that you are still engaged to him," said I, smiling at her blank face.

"I suppose I am," she cried. "Isn't it awful? What shall I do, Mr. Crocker? You are so sensible, and have had so much experience."

"I beg your pardon," I remarked grimly.

"Oh, you know what I mean: not that kind of experience, of course. But breach of promise cases and that sort of thing. I have a photograph of him with something written over it."

"Something compromising?" I inquired.

"Yes, you would probably call it so," she answered, reddening. "But there is no need of my repeating it. And then I have a lot of other things. If I write to break off the engagement I shall lose dignity, and it will appear as though I had regrets. I don't wish him to think that, of all things. What shall I do?"

"Do nothing," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"Just that. Do not break the engagement, and keep the photograph and other articles for evidence. If he makes any overtures, don't consider them for an instant. And I think, Miss Trevor, you will succeed sooner or later in making him very uncomfortable. Were he any one else I shouldn't advise such a course, but you won't lose any dignity and self-respect by it, as no one will be likely to hear of it. He can't be taken seriously, and plainly he has never taken any one else so. He hasn't even gone to the trouble to notify you that he does not intend marrying you."

I saw from her expression that my suggestion was favorably entertained.

"What a joke it would be!" she cried delightedly.

"And a decided act of charity," I added, "to the next young woman on his list."

CHAPTER VIII

The humor of my proposition appealed more strongly to Miss Trevor than I had looked for, and from that time forward she became her old self again; for, even after she had conquered her love for the Celebrity, the mortification of having been jilted by him remained. Now she had come to look upon the matter in its true proportions, and her anticipation of a possible chance of teaching him a lesson was a pleasure to behold. Our table in the dining-room became again the abode of scintillating wit and caustic repartee, Farrar bracing up to his old standard, and the demand for seats in the vicinity rose to an animated competition. Mr. Charles Wrexell Allen's chair was finally awarded to a nephew of Judge Short, who could turn a story to perfection.

So life at the inn settled down again to what it had been before the Celebrity came to disturb it.

I had my own reasons for staying away from Mohair. More than once as I drove over to the county-seat in my buggy I had met the Celebrity on a tall tandem cart, with one of Mr. Cooke's high-steppers in the lead, and Miss Thorn in the low seat. I had forgotten to mention that my friend was something of a whip. At such times I would bow very civilly and pass on; not without a twinge, I confess. And as the result of one of these meetings I had to retrace several miles of my road for a brief I had forgotten. After that I took another road, several miles longer, for the sight of Miss Thorn with him seriously disturbed my peace of mind. But at length the day came, as I had feared, when circumstances forced me to go to my client's place. One morning Miss Trevor and I were about stepping into the canoe for our customary excursion when one of Mr. Cooke's footmen arrived with a note for each of us. They were from Mrs. Cooke, and requested the pleasure of our company that day for luncheon. "If you were I, would you go?" Miss Trevor asked doubtfully.

"Of course," I replied.

"But the consequences may be unpleasant."

"Don't let them," I said. "Of what use is tact to a woman if not for just such occasions?"

My invitation had this characteristic note tacked on the end of it

"DEAR CROCKER: Where are you? Where is the judge? F. F. C."

I corralled the judge, and we started off across the fields, in no very mild state of fear of that gentleman's wife, whose vigilance was seldom relaxed. And thus we came by a circuitous route to

Mohair, the judge occupied by his own guilty thoughts, and I by others not less disturbing. My client welcomed the judge with that warmth of manner which grappled so many of his friends to his heart, and they disappeared together into the Ethiopian card-room, which was filled with the assegais and exclamation point shields Mr. Cooke had had made at the Sawmill at Beaverton.

I learned from one of the lords-in-waiting loafing about the hall that Mrs. Cooke was out on the golf links, chaperoning some of the Asquith young women whose mothers had not seen fit to ostracize Mohair. Mr. Cooke's ten friends were with them. But this discreet and dignified servant could not reveal the whereabouts of Miss Thorn and of Mr. Allen, both of whom I was decidedly anxious to avoid. I was much disgusted, therefore, to come upon the Celebrity in the smoking-room, writing rapidly, with sheets of manuscript piled beside him. And he was quite good-natured over my intrusion.

"No," said he, "don't go. It's only a short story I promised for a Christmas number. They offered me fifteen cents a word and promised to put my name on the cover in red, so I couldn't very well refuse. It's no inspiration, though, I tell you that." He rose and pressed a bell behind him and ordered whiskeys and ginger ales, as if he were in a hotel. "Sit down, Crocker," he said, waving me to a morocco chair. "Why don't you come over to see us oftener?"

"I've been quite busy," I said.

This remark seemed to please him immensely.

"What a sly old chap you are," said he; "really, I shall have to go back to the inn and watch you."

"What the deuce do you mean?" I demanded.

He looked me over in well-bred astonishment and replied:

"Hang me, Crocker, if I can make you out. You seem to know the world pretty well, and yet when a fellow twits you on a little flirtation you act as though you were going to black his eyes."

"A little flirtation!" I repeated, aghast.

"Oh, well," he said, smiling, "we won't quarrel over a definition. Call it anything you like."

"Don't you think this a little uncalled for?" I asked, beginning to lose my temper.

"Bless you, no. Not among friends: not among such friends as we are."

"I didn't know we were such devilish good friends," I retorted warmly.

"Oh, yes, we are, devilish good friends," he answered with assurance; "known each other from boyhood, and all that. And I say, old chap," he added, "you needn't be jealous of me, you know. I got out of that long ago. And I'm after something else now."

For a space I was speechless. Then the ludicrous side of the matter struck me, and I laughed in spite of myself. Better, after all, to deal with a fool according to his folly. The Celebrity glanced at the door and drew his chair closer to mine.

"Crocker," he said confidentially, "I'm glad you came here to-day. There is a thing or two I wished to consult you about."

"Professional?" I asked, trying to head him off.

"No," he replied, "amateur,—beastly amateur. A bungle, if I ever made one. The truth is, I executed rather a faux pas over there at Asquith. Tell me," said he, diving desperately at the root of it, "how does Miss Trevor feel about my getting out? I meant to let her down easier; 'pon my word, I did."

This is a way rascals have of judging other men by themselves.

"Well," said I, "it was rather a blow, of course."

"Of course," he assented.

"And all the more unexpected," I went on, "from a man who has written reams on constancy."

I flatter myself that this nearly struck home, for he was plainly annoyed.

"Oh, bother that!" said he. "How many gowns believe in their own sermons? How many lawyers believe in their own arguments?"

"Unhappily, not as many as might."

"I don't object to telling you, old chap," he continued, "that I went in a little deeper than I intended. A good deal deeper, in fact. Miss Trevor is a deuced fine girl, and all that; but absolutely impossible. I forgot myself, and I confess I was pretty close to caught."

"I congratulate you," I said gravely.

"That's the point of it. I don't know that I'm out of the woods yet. I wanted to see you and find out how she was acting."

My first impulse was to keep him in hot water. Fortunately I thought twice.

"I don't know anything about Miss Trevor's feelings—" I began.

"Naturally not—" he interrupted, with a smile.

"But I have a notion that, if she ever fancied you, she doesn't care a straw for you to-day."

"Doesn't she now," he replied somewhat regretfully. Here was one of the knots in his character I never could untie.

"Understand, that is simply my guess," I said. "You must have discovered that it is never possible to be sure of a woman's feelings."

"Found that out long ago," he replied with conviction, and added: "Then you think I need not anticipate any trouble from her?"

"I have told you what I think," I answered; "you know better than I what the situation is."

He still lingered.

"Does she appear to be in,—ah,—in good spirits?"

I had work to keep my face straight.

"Capital," I said; "I never saw her happier."

This seemed to satisfy him.

"Downcast at first, happy now," he remarked thoughtfully. "Yes, she got over it. I'm much obliged to you, Crocker."

I left him to finish his short story and walked out across the circle of smooth lawn towards the golf links. And there I met Mrs. Cooke and her niece coming in together. The warm red of her costume became Miss Thorn wonderfully, and set off the glossy black of her hair. And her skin was glowing from the exercise. An involuntary feeling of admiration for this tall, athletic young woman swept over me, and I halted in my steps for no other reason, I believe, than that I might look upon her the longer.

What man, I thought resentfully, would not travel a thousand miles to be near her?

"It is Mr. Crocker," said Mrs. Cooke; "I had given up all hope of ever seeing you again. Why have you been such a stranger?"

"As if you didn't know, Aunt Maria," Miss Thorn put in gayly.

"Oh yes, I know," returned her aunt, "and I have not been foolish enough to invite the bar without the magnet. And yet, Mr. Crocker," she went on playfully, "I had imagined that you were the one man in a hundred who did not need an inducement."

Miss Thorn began digging up the turf with her lofter: it was a painful moment for me.

"You might at least have tried me, Mrs. Cooke," I said.

Miss Thorn looked up quickly from the ground, her eyes searchingly upon my face. And Mrs. Cooke seemed surprised.

"We are glad you came, at any rate," she answered.

And at luncheon my seat was next to Miss Thorn's, while the Celebrity was placed at the right of Miss Trevor. I observed that his face went blank from time to time at some quip of hers: even a dull woman

may be sharp under such circumstances, and Miss Trevor had wits to spare. And I marked that she never allowed her talk with him to drift into deep water; when there was danger of this she would draw the entire table into their conversation by some adroit remark, or create a laugh at his expense. As for me, I held a discreet if uncomfortable silence, save for the few words which passed between Miss Thorn and me. Once or twice I caught her covert glance on me. But I felt, and strongly, that there could be no friendship between us now, and I did not care to dissimulate merely for the sake of appearances. Besides, I was not a little put out over the senseless piece of gossip which had gone abroad concerning me.

It had been arranged as part of the day's programme that Mr. Cooke was to drive those who wished to go over the Rise in his new brake. But the table was not graced by our host's presence, Mrs. Cooke apologizing for him, explaining that he had disappeared quite mysteriously. It turned out that he and the judge had been served with luncheon in the Ethiopian card-room, and neither threats nor fair words could draw him away. The judge had not held such cards for years, and it was in vain that I talked to him of consequences. The Ten decided to remain and watch a game which was pronounced little short of phenomenal, and my client gave orders for the smaller brake and requested the Celebrity to drive. And this he was nothing loth to do. For the edification as well as the assurance of the party Mr. Allen explained, while we were waiting under the porte cochere, how he had driven the Windsor coach down Piccadilly at the height of the season, with a certain member of Parliament and noted whip on the box seat.

And, to do him justice, he could drive. He won the instant respect of Mr. Cooke's coachman by his manner of taking up the lines, and clinched it when he dropped a careless remark concerning the off wheeler. And after the critical inspection of the horses which is proper he climbed up on the box. There was much hesitation among the ladies as to who should take the seat of honor: Mrs. Cooke declining, it was pressed upon Miss Thorn. But she, somewhat to my surprise, declined also, and it was finally filled by a young woman from Asquith.

As we drove off I found myself alone with Mrs. Cooke's niece on the seat behind.

The day was cool and snappy for August, and the Rise all green with a lavish nature. Now we, plunged into a deep shade with the boughs lacing each other overhead, and crossed dainty, rustic bridges over the cold trout-streams, the boards giving back the clatter of our horses' feet: or anon we shot into a clearing, with a colored glimpse of the lake and its curving shore far below us. I had always loved that piece of country since the first look I had of it from the Asquith road, and the sight of it rarely failed to set my blood a-tingle with pleasure. But to-day I scarcely saw it. I wondered what whim had impelled Miss Thorn to get into this seat. She paid but little attention to me during the first part of the drive, though a mere look in my direction seemed to afford her amusement. And at last, half way up the Rise, where the road takes to an embankment, I got a decided jar.

"Mr. Allen," she cried to the Celebrity, "you must stop here. Do you remember how long we tarried over this bit on Friday?"

He tightened the lines and threw a meaning glance backward.

I was tempted to say:

"You and Mr. Allen should know these roads rather well, Miss Thorn."

"Every inch of them," she replied.

We must have gone a mile farther when she turned upon me.

"It is your duty to be entertaining, Mr. Crocker. What in the world are you thinking of, with your brow all puckered up, forbidding as an owl?"

"I was thinking how some people change," I answered, with a readiness which surprised me.

"Strange," she said, "I had the same thing in mind. I hear decidedly queer tales of you; canoeing every day that business does not prevent, and whole evenings spent at the dark end of a veranda."

"What rubbish!" I exclaimed, not knowing whether to be angered or amused.

"Come, sir," she said, with mock sternness, "answer the charge. Guilty or not guilty?"

"First let me make a counter-charge," said I; "you have given me the right. Not long ago a certain young lady came to Mohair and found there a young author of note with whom she had had some previous acquaintance. She did not hesitate to intimate her views on the character of this Celebrity, and her views were not favorable."

I paused. There was some satisfaction in seeing Miss Thorn biting her lip.

"Well?"

"Not at all favorable, mind you," I went on. "And the young lady's general appearance was such as to lead one to suppose her the sincerest of persons. Now I am at a loss to account for a discrepancy between her words and her actions."

While I talked Miss Thorn's face had been gradually turning from mine until now I saw only the dainty knot at the back of her head. Her shoulders were quivering with laughter. But presently her face came back all gravity, save a suspicious gleam of mirth in the eyes.

"It does seem inconsistent, Mr. Crocker; I grant you that. No doubt it is so. But let me ask you something: did you ever yet know a woman who was not inconsistent?"

I did not realize I had been side-tracked until I came to think over this conversation afterwards.

"I am not sure," I replied. "Perhaps I merely hoped that one such existed."

She dropped her eyes.

"Then don't be surprised at my failing," said she. "No doubt I criticised the Celebrity severely. I cannot recall what I said. But it is upon the better side of a character that we must learn to look. Did it ever strike you that the Celebrity had some exceedingly fine qualities?"

"No, it did not," I answered positively.

"Nevertheless, he has," she went on, in all apparent seriousness. "He drives almost as well as Uncle Farquhar, dances well, and is a capital paddle."

"You were speaking of qualities, not accomplishments," I said. A horrible suspicion that she was having a little fun at my expense crossed my mind.

Very good, then. You must admit that he is generous to a fault, amiable; and persevering, else he would never have attained the position he enjoys. And his affection for you, Mr. Crocker, is really touching, considering how little he gets in return."

"Come, Miss Thorn," I said severely, "this is ridiculous. I don't like him, and never shall. I liked him once, before he took to writing drivel. But he must have been made over since then. And what is more, with all respect to your opinion, I don't believe he likes me."

Miss Thorn straightened up with dignity and said:

"You do him an injustice. But perhaps you will learn to appreciate him before he leaves Mohair."

"That is not likely," I replied—not at all pleasantly, I fear. And again I thought I observed in her the same desire to laugh she had before exhibited.

And all the way back her talk was of nothing except the Celebrity. I tried every method short of absolute rudeness to change the subject, and went from silence to taciturnity and back again to silence. She discussed his books and his mannerisms, even the growth of his popularity. She repeated anecdotes of him from Naples to St. Petersburg, from Tokio to Cape Town. And when we finally stopped under the porte cochere I had scarcely the civility left to say good-bye.

I held out my hand to help her to the ground, but she paused on the second step.

"Mr. Crocker," she observed archly, "I believe you once told me you had not known many girls in your life."

"True," I said; "why do you ask?"

"I wished to be sure of it," she replied.

And jumping down without my assistance, she laughed and disappeared into the house.

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