"Isn't he your friend?" asked Cynthia.

"Oh, yes," said Bob, "and one of the best in the world. Only — I shouldn't have thought you'd care to talk to him." And he looked around, for fear the vigilant Mr. Duncan was already in the park and had discovered them. Cynthia smiled, and immediately became grave again.

"So it was only on Mr. Duncan's account that you didn't ask me to come down to the parlor?" she said.

Bob was in a quandary. He was a truthful person, and he had learned something of the world through his three years at Cambridge. He had seen many young women, and many kinds of them. But the girl beside him was such a mixture of innocence and astuteness that he was wholly at a loss how to deal with her — how to parry her searching questions.

"Naturally I wanted to have you all to myself," he said; "you ought to know that."

Cynthia did not commit herself on this point. She wished to go mercilessly to the root of the matter, but the notion of what this would imply prevented her. Bob took advantage of her silence.

"Everybody who sees you falls a victim, Cynthia," he went on; "Mrs. Duncan and Janet lost their hearts. You ought to have heard them praising you at breakfast." He paused abruptly, thinking of the rest of that conversation, and laughed. Bob seemed fated to commit himself that day. "I heard the way you handled Heth Sutton," he said, plunging in. "I'll bet he felt as if he'd been dropped out of the third-story window," and Bob laughed again. "I'd have given a thousand dollars to have been there. Somers and I went out to supper with a classmate who lives in Washington, in that house over there," and he pointed casually to one of the imposing mansions fronting on the park. Mrs. Duncan said she'd never heard anybody lay it on the way you did. I don't believe you half know what happened, Cynthia. You made a ten-strike."

"A ten-strike?" she repeated.

"Well," he said, "you not only laid out Heth, but my father and Mr. Duncan, too. Mrs. Duncan laughed at 'em — she isn't afraid of anything. But they didn't say a word all through breakfast. I've never seen my father so mad. He ought to have known better than to run up against Uncle Jethro."

"How did they run up against Uncle Jethro?" asked Cynthia, now keenly interested.

"Don't you know?" exclaimed Bob, in astonishment.

"No," said Cynthia, "or I shouldn't have asked."

"Didn't Uncle Jethro tell you about it?"

"He never tells me anything about his affairs," she answered.

Bob's astonishment did not wear off at once. Here was a new phase, and he was very hard put. He had heard, casually, a good deal of abuse of Jethro and his methods in the last two days.

"Well," he said, "I don't know anything about politics. I don't know myself why father and Mr. Duncan were so eager for this postmastership. But they were. And I heard them say something about the President going back on them when they had telegraphed from Chicago and come to see him here. And maybe they didn't let Heth in for it. It seems Uncle Jethro only had to walk up to the White House. They ought to have sense enough to know that he runs the state. But what's the use of wasting time over this business?" said Bob. "I told you I was going to Brampton before the term begins just to see you, didn't I?"

"Yes, but I didn't believe you," said Cynthia.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because it's my nature, I suppose," she replied.

This was too much for Bob, exasperated though he was, and he burst into laughter.

"You're the queerest girl I've ever known," he said. Not a very original remark.

"That must be saying a great deal," she answered.

"Why?"

"You must have known many."

"I have," he admitted, "and none of 'em, no matter

how much they'd knocked about, were able to look out for themselves any better than you."

"Not even Cassandra Hopkins?" Cynthia could not resist saying. She saw that she had scored; his expressions registered his sensations so accurately.

"What do you know about her?" he said.

"Oh," said Cynthia, mysteriously, "I heard that you were very fond of her at Andover."

Bob could not help pluming himself a little. He thought the fact that she had mentioned the matter a flaw in Cynthia's armor, as indeed it was. And yet he was not proud of the Cassandra Hopkins episode in his career.

"Cassandra is one of the institutions at Andover," said he; "most fellows have to take a course in Cassandra to complete their education."

"Yours seems to be very complete," Cynthia retorted.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, looking at her, "no wonder you made mince-meat of the Honorable Heth. Where did you learn it all, Cynthia?"

Cynthia did not know. She merely wondered where she would be if she hadn't learned it. Something told her that if it were not for this anchor she would be drifting out to sea: might, indeed, soon be drifting out to sea in spite of it. It was one thing for Mr. Robert Worthington, with his numerous resources, to amuse himself with a girl in her position; it would be quite another thing for the girl. She got to her feet and held out her hand to him.

"Good-by," she said.

"Good-by?"

"We are leaving Washington at one o'clock, and Uncle Jethro will be worried if I am not in time for dinner."

"Leaving at one! That's the worst luck I've had yet. But I'm going back to the hotel myself."

Cynthia didn't see how she was to prevent him walking with her. She would not have admitted to herself that she had enjoyed this encounter, since she was trying so hard not to enjoy it. So they started together out of the

park. Bob, for a wonder, was silent awhile, glancing now and then at her profile. He knew that he had a great deal to say, but he couldn't decide exactly what it was to be. This is often the case with young men in his state of mind: in fact, to be paradoxical again, he might hardly be said at this time to have had a state of mind. He lacked both an attitude and a policy.

"If you see Duncan before I do, let me know," he remarked finally.

Cynthia bit her lip. "Why should I?" she asked.

"Because we've only got five minutes more alone together, at best. If we see him in time, we can go down a side street."

"I think it would be hard to get away from Mr. Duncan if we met him — even if we wanted to," she said, laughing outright.

"You don't know how true that is," he replied, with feeling.

"That sounds as though you'd tried it before."

He paid no attention to this thrust.

"I shan't see you again till I get to Brampton," he said; "that will be a whole week. And then," he ventured to look at her, "I shan't see you until the Christmas holidays. You might be a little kind, Cynthia. You know I've — I've always thought the world of you. I don't know how I'm going to get through the three months without seeing you."

"You managed to get through a good many years," said Cynthia, looking at the pavement.

"I know," he said; "I was sent away to school and college, and our lives separated."

"Yes, our lives separated," she assented.

"And I didn't know you were going to be like — like this," he went on, vaguely enough, but with feeling.

"Like what?"

"Like — well, I'd rather be with you and talk to you than any girl I ever saw. I don't care who she is," Bob declared, "or how much she may have travelled." He was running into deep water. "Why are you so cold, Cynthia?

Why can't you be as you used to be? You used to like me well enough."

"And I like you now," answered Cynthia. They were very near the hotel by this time.

"You talk as if you were ten years older than I," he said, smiling plaintively.

She stopped and turned to him, smiling. They had reached the steps.

"I believe I am, Bob," she replied. "I haven't seen much of the world, but I've seen something of its troubles. Don't be foolish. If you're coming to Brampton just to see me, don't come. Good-by." And she gave him her hand frankly.

"But I will come to Brampton," he cried, taking her hand and squeezing it. "I'd like to know why I shouldn't come."

As Cynthia drew her hand away a gentleman came out of the hotel, paused for a brief moment by the door and stared at them, and then passed on without a word or a nod of recognition. It was Mr. Worthington. Bob looked after his father, and then glanced at Cynthia. There was a trifle more color in her cheeks, and her head was raised a little, and her eyes were fixed upon him gravely.

"You should know why not," she said, and before he could answer her she was gone into the hotel. He did not attempt to follow her, but stood where she had left him in the sunlight.

He was aroused by the voice of the genial colored doorkeeper.

"Wal, suh, you found the lady, Mistah Wo'thington. Thought you would, suh. T'other young gentleman come in while ago — looked as if he was feelin' powerful bad, Mistah Wo'thington."

CHAPTER VII

AN AMAZING ENCOUNTER

When they reached Boston, Cynthia felt almost as if she were home again, and Ephraim declared that he had had the same feeling when he returned from the war. Though it be the prosperous capital of New England, it is a city of homes, and the dwellers of it have held stanchly to the belief of their forefathers that the home is the very foundation-rock of the nation. Held stanchly to other beliefs, too: that wealth carries with it some little measure of responsibility. The stranger within the gates of that city feels that if he falls, a heedless world will not go charging over his body: that a helping hand will be stretched out, — a helping and a wise hand that will inquire into the circumstances of his fall — but still a human hand.

They were sitting in the parlor of the Tremont House that morning with the sun streaming in the windows, waiting for Ephraim.

"Uncle Jethro," Cynthia asked, abruptly, "did you ever know my mother?"

Jethro started, and looked at her quickly.

"W-why, Cynthy?" he asked.

"Because she grew up in Coniston," answered Cynthia. "I never thought of it before, but of course you must have known her."

"Yes, I knew her," he said.

"Did you know her well?" she persisted.

Jethro got up and went over to the window, where he stood with his back toward her.

"Yes, Cynthy," he answered at length.