

"Perhaps it would," said her sister, "but I think I can understand and sympathize with it."

Mrs. Carling broke the silence which followed for a moment or two as if she were thinking aloud. "You have plenty of money," she said, and colored at her inadvertence. Her sister looked at her for an instant with a humorous smile, and then, as she rose and touched the bell button, said, "That's another reason."

CHAPTER X.

I THINK it should hardly be imputed to John as a fault or a shortcoming that he did not for a long time realize his father's failing powers. True, as has been stated, he had noted some changes in appearance on his return, but they were not great enough to be startling, and, though he thought at times that his father's manner was more subdued than he had ever known it to be, nothing really occurred to arouse his suspicion or anxiety. After a few days the two men appeared to drop into their accustomed relation and routine, meeting in the morning and at dinner; but as John picked up the threads of his acquaintance he usually went out after dinner, and even when he did not his father went early to his own apartment.

From John's childhood he had been much of the time away from home, and there had never, partly from that circumstance and partly from the older man's natural and habitual reserve, been very much intimacy between them. The father did not give his own confidence, and, while always kind and sympathetic when appealed to, did not ask his son's; and, loving his father well and loyally, and trusting him implicitly, it did not occur to John to feel that there was anything wanting in the relation. It was as

it had always been. He was accustomed to accept what his father did or said without question, and, as is very often the case, had always regarded him as an old man. He had never felt that they could be in the same equation. In truth, save for their mutual affection, they had little in common; and if, as may have been the case, his father had any cravings for a closer and more intimate relation, he made no sign, acquiescing in his son's actions as the son did in his, without question or suggestion. They did not know each other, and such cases are not rare, more is the pity.

But as time went on even John's unwatchful eye could not fail to notice that all was not well with his father. Haggard lines were multiplying in the quiet face, and the silence at the dinner table was often unbroken except by John's unfruitful efforts to keep some sort of a conversation in motion. More and more frequently it occurred that his father would retire to his own room immediately after dinner was over, and the food on his plate would be almost untouched, while he took more wine than had ever been his habit. John, retiring late, would often hear him stirring uneasily in his room, and it would be plain in the morning that he had spent a wakeful, if not a sleepless, night. Once or twice on such a morning John had suggested to his father that he should not go down to the office, and the suggestion had been met with so irritable a negative as to excite his wonder.

It was a day in the latter part of March. The winter had been unusually severe, and lingered into spring with a heart-sickening tenacity, oc-

casional hints of clemency and promise being followed by recurrences which were as irritating as a personal affront.

John had held to his work in the office, if not with positive enthusiasm, at least with industry, and thought that he had made some progress. On the day in question the managing clerk commented briefly but favorably on something of his which was satisfactory, and, such experiences being rare, he was conscious of a feeling of mild elation. He was also cherishing the anticipation of a call at Sixty-ninth Street, where, for reasons unnecessary to recount, he had not been for a week. At dinner that night his father seemed more inclined than for a long time to keep up a conversation which, though of no special import, was cheerful in comparison with the silence which had grown to be almost the rule, and the two men sat for a while over the coffee and cigars. Presently, however, the elder rose from the table, saying pleasantly, "I suppose you are going out to-night."

"Not if you'd like me to stay in," was the reply. "I have no definite engagement."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Lenox, "not at all, not at all," and as he passed his son on the way out of the room he put out his hand and taking John's, said, "Good night."

As John stood for a moment rather taken aback, he heard his father mount the stairs to his room. He was puzzled by the unexpected and unusual occurrence, but finally concluded that his father, realizing how taciturn they had become of late, wished to resume their former status, and this view was confirmed to his mind by the fact that they had been more companion-

able than usual that evening, albeit that nothing of any special significance had been said.

As has been stated, a longer interval than usual had elapsed since John's last visit to Sixty-ninth Street, a fact which had been commented on by Mr. Carling, but not mentioned between the ladies. When he found himself at that hospitable house on that evening, he was greeted by Miss Blake alone.

"Julius did not come down to-night, and my sister is with him," she said, "so you will have to put up with my society—unless you'd like me to send up for Alice. Julius is strictly *en retraite*, I should say."

"Don't disturb her, I beg," protested John, laughing, and wondering a bit at the touch of coquetry in her speech, something unprecedented in his experience of her, "if you are willing to put up with my society. I hope Mr. Carling is not ill?"

They seated themselves as she replied: "No, nothing serious, I should say. A bit of a cold, I fancy; and for a fortnight he has been more nervous than usual. The changes in the weather have been so great and so abrupt that they have worn upon his nerves. He is getting very uneasy again. Now, after spending the winter, and when spring is almost at hand, I believe that if he could make up his mind where to go he would be for setting off to-morrow."

"Really?" said John, in a tone of dismay.

"Quite so," she replied with a nod.

"But," he objected, "it seems too late or too early. Spring may drop in upon us any day. Isn't this something very recent?"

"It has been developing for a week or ten

days," she answered, "and symptoms have indicated a crisis for some time. In fact," she added, with a little vexed laugh, "we have talked of nothing for a week but the advantages and disadvantages of Florida, California, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia at large; besides St. Augustine, Monterey, Santa Barbara, Aiken, Asheville, Hot Springs, Old Point Comfort, Bermuda, and I don't know how many other places, not forgetting Atlantic City and Lakewood, and only not Barbadoes and the Sandwich Islands because nobody happened to think of them. Julius," remarked Miss Blake, "would have given a forenoon to the discussion of the two latter places as readily as to any of the others."

"Can't you talk him along into warm weather?" suggested John, with rather a mirthless laugh. "Don't you think that if the weather were to change for good, as it's likely to do almost any time now, he might put off going till the usual summer flitting?"

"The change in his mind will have to come pretty soon if I am to retain my mental faculties," she declared. "He might possibly, but I am afraid not," she said, shaking her head. "He has the idea fixed in his mind, and considerations of the weather here, while they got him started, are not now so much the question. He has the moving fever, and I am afraid it will have to run its course. I think," she said, after a moment, "that if I were to formulate a special anathema, it would be, 'May traveling seize you!'"

"Or restlessness," suggested John.

"Yes," she said, "that's more accurate, per-

haps, but it doesn't sound quite so smart. Julius is in that state of mind when the only place that seems desirable is somewhere else."

"Of course you will have to go," said John mournfully.

"Oh, yes," she replied, with an air of compulsory resignation. "I shall not only have to go, of course, but I shall probably have to decide where in order to save my mind. But it will certainly be somewhere, so I might as well be packing my trunks."

"And you will be away indefinitely, I suppose?"

"Yes, I imagine so."

"Dear me!" John ejaculated in a dismal tone.

They were sitting as described on a former occasion, and the young woman was engaged upon the second (perhaps the third, or even the fourth) of the set of doilies to which she had committed herself. She took some stitches with a composed air, without responding to her companion's exclamation.

"I'm awfully sorry," he said presently, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, his hands hanging in an attitude of unmistakable dejection, and staring fixedly into the fire.

"I am very sorry myself," she said, bending her head a little closer over her work. "I think I like being in New York in the spring better than at any other time; and I don't at all fancy the idea of living in my trunks again for an indefinite period."

"I shall miss you horribly," he said, turning his face toward her.

Her eyes opened with a lift of the brows, but

whether the surprise so indicated was quite genuine is a matter for conjecture.

"Yes," he declared desperately, "I shall, indeed."

"I should fancy you must have plenty of other friends," she said, flushing a little, "and I have wondered sometimes whether Julius's demands upon you were not more confident than warrantable, and whether you wouldn't often rather have gone elsewhere than to come here to play cards with him." She actually said this as if she meant it.

"Do you suppose—" he exclaimed, and checked himself. "No," he said, "I have come because—well, I've been only too glad to come, and—I suppose it has got to be a habit," he added, rather lamely. "You see, I've never known any people in the way I have known you. It has seemed to me more like home life than anything I've ever known. There has never been any one but my father and I, and you can have no idea what it has been to me to be allowed to come here as I have, and—oh, you must know—" He hesitated, and instantly she advanced her point.

Her face was rather white, and the hand which lay upon the work in her lap trembled a little, while she clasped the arm of the chair with the other; but she broke in upon his hesitation with an even voice:

"It has been very pleasant for us all, I'm sure," she said, "and, frankly, I'm sorry that it must be interrupted for a while, but that is about all there is of it, isn't it? We shall probably be back not later than October, I should say, and then you can renew your contests with Julius and your controversies with me."

Her tone and what she said recalled to him their last night on board the ship, but there was no relenting on this occasion. He realized that for a moment he had been on the verge of telling the girl that he loved her, and he realized, too, that she had divined his impulse and prevented the disclosure; but he registered a vow that he would know before he saw her again whether he might consistently tell her his love, and win or lose upon the touch.

Miss Blake made several inaccurate efforts to introduce her needle at the exact point desired, and when that endeavor was accomplished broke the silence by saying, "Speaking of 'October,' have you read the novel? I think it is charming."

"Yes," said John, with his vow in his mind, but not sorry for the diversion, "and I enjoyed it very much. I thought it was immensely clever, but I confess that I didn't quite sympathize with the love affairs of a hero who was past forty, and I must also confess that I thought the girl was, well—to put it in plain English—a fool."

Mary laughed, with a little quaver in her voice. "Do you know," she said, "that sometimes it seems to me that I am older than you are?"

"I know you're awfully wise," said John with a laugh, and from that their talk drifted off into the safer channels of their usual intercourse until he rose to say good night.

"Of course, we shall see you again before we go," she said as she gave him her hand.

"Oh," he declared, "I intend regularly to haunt the place."

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN John came down the next morning his father, who was, as a rule, the most punctual of men, had not appeared. He opened the paper and sat down to wait. Ten minutes passed, fifteen, twenty. He rang the bell. "Have you heard my father this morning?" he said to Jeffrey, remembering for the first time that he himself had not.

"No, sir," said the man. "He most generally coughs a little in the morning, but I don't think I heard him this morning, sir."

"Go up and see why he doesn't come down," said John, and a moment later he followed the servant upstairs, to find him standing at the chamber door with a frightened face.

"He must be very sound asleep, sir," said Jeffrey. "He hasn't answered to my knockin' or callin', sir." John tried the door. He found the chain bolt on, and it opened but a few inches. "Father!" he called, and then again, louder. He turned almost unconsciously to Jeffrey, and found his own apprehensions reflected in the man's face. "We must break in the door," he said. "Now, together!" and the bolt gave way.

His father lay as if asleep. "Go for the doctor at once! Bring him back with you. Run!" he cried to the servant. Custom and instinct