

Tishy acknowledges to herself that she desires nothing better. Yes, papa dear, she will, indeed she will, tell him everything. And then makes a very fair revelation of her love-affair—a little dry and stilted in the actual phrasing, perhaps, but then, what can you expect when one's father is inclined to be stiff and awkward in such a matter, to approach it formally, and consider it an interview? It was all mamma's fault, of course. Why should she be summoned before the bar of the house? Why couldn't her father find his way into her confidence in the natural current of events? However, this was better than nothing.

Besides, we softened gradually as we developed the subject. One of us, who was Mr. Bradshaw at first, became Julius later, with a strong lubricating effect. We began with sincere attachment, but we loved each other dearly before we had done. We didn't know when "it" began exactly—which was a fib, for we were perfectly well aware that "it" began that evening at Krakatoa Villa, which has been chronicled herein—but for a long time past Julius had been asking to be allowed to memorialise the Professor on the subject.

"But you know, papa dear, I couldn't say he was to speak to you until I was quite certain of myself. Besides, I did want him to be on better terms with mamma first."

Professor Wilson flushed angrily, and began with a knitted brow, "I wish your mother would——" but stopped abruptly. Then, calming down: "But you are quite certain *now*, my dear Lætitia?" Oh dear, yes; no doubt of that. And how about Julius? The confident ring of the girl's laugh, and her "Why, you should hear him!" showed that she, at least, was well satisfied of her lover's earnestness.

"Well, my dear child," said the Professor, who was beginning to feel that it was time to go back to his unfinished *ignoramus*, *tyro*, or *sciolist*; "I tell you what I shall do. When's he coming next? Thursday, to dinner. Very well. I shall make a little opportunity for a quiet talk with him, and we shall see."

The young lady came out of the library on the whole comfortabler than she had entered it, and finished buttoning that glove in the passage. As she stood reflecting that papa would really be very nice if he would shave more carefully—for the remains of his adieu was still rasping her cheek—she was aware

of the voice of the carpet; she heard it complain, through the medium of its layer, or stretcher, who seemed to mean to pass the remainder of his days scratching the head of perplexity on the scene of his recent failure to add to his professional achievements.

"It's what I say to the guv'nor"—thus ran his Jeremiad—"in dealin' with these here irregular settin's out, where nothin' not to say parallel with anything else, nor dimensions lendin' theirselves to accommodation. 'Just you let me offer it in,' I says 'afore the final stitchin' to, or even a paper template in extra cases is a savin' in the end.' Because it stands to reason there goes more expense with an ill-cut squint or obtoose angle, involvin' work to rectify, than cut ackerate in the first go-off. Not but what ruckles may disappear under the tread, only there's no reliance to be placed. You may depend on it, to make a job there's nothin' like careful plannin', and foresight in the manner of speakin'. And, as I say to the guv'nor, there's no need for a stout brown-paper template to go to waste, seein' it works in with the under-packin'." And much more which Tishy could still hear murmuring on in the distance as she closed the street door and fled to an overdue appointment with Sally, into whose sympathetic ear she could pour all her new records of the progress of the row.

To tell the whole of the prolonged pitched battle that ensued would take too much ink and paper. The Dragon fought magnificently, so long as she had the powerful backing of her married daughter, Mrs. Sowerby Bagster, and the skirmishing help of Athene. This latter was, however, not to be relied on—might go over to the enemy any moment. Mrs. Bagster, or Clarissa, who was an elder sister of Lætitia's, became lukewarm, too, on a side-issue being raised. It did not appear to connect itself logically with the bone of contention, having reference entirely to vaccination from the calf. But it led to an exaggerated sensitiveness on her part as to the responsibility we incurred by interference with what might (after all) be the Will of Providence. If this should prove so, it would be our duty not to repine. Clarissa contrived to surround the subject with an unprovoked halo of religious meekness, and to work round to the conclusion that it would be presumptuous not to ask Mr. Brad-

shaw to dinner. Only this resulted absolutely and entirely from her refusing to have her three children all vaccinated from the calf forthwith, because their grandmother thought it necessary. The latter, finding herself deserted in her hour of need by a powerful ally—for three whole children had given Clarissa a deep insight into social ethics, and a weighty authority—surrendered grudgingly. She tried her best to make her invitation to dinner take the form of leave to come to dinner, and partly succeeded. Her suggestions that she hoped Mr. Bradshaw would understand the rules of the game at the table of Society caused the defection of her remaining confederate, Athene, who turned against her, exclaiming: "He won't eat with his knife, at any rate!" However, it was too late to influence current events. The battle was fought and over.

The obnoxious young man didn't eat with his knife when he came, with docility, a day after he received the invitation. Remember, he appears originally in this story as a chosen of Cattle's, one warranted to defy detection by the best-informed genteelologist. He went through his ordeal very well, on the whole, considering that Egerton (from friendship) was always on the alert to give him tips about civilised conduct, and that Mrs. Wilson called him nearly every known dissyllabic name with *A*'s in it—Brathwaite, Palgrave, Bradlaugh, Playfair, and so on, but not Bradshaw. She did this the more as she never addressed him directly, treating him without disguise as the third-person singular in a concrete form. This was short-sighted, because it stimulated her husband to a tone of civility which would probably have risen to deference if the good lady had not just stopped short of insult.

Egerton and the only other male guest (who was the negative young pianist known to Sally as Somebody Elsley) having found it convenient to go away at smoking-time to inspect the latter's bicycle, the Professor seized his opportunity for conversation with the third-person-singular. He approached the subject abruptly:

"Well, it's Lætitia, I understand, that we're making up to, eh?" Perhaps it was this sudden conversion to the first person plural that made the young man blush up to the roots of his hair.

"What can I say?" he asked hesitatingly. "You see, Professor Wilson, if I say yes, it will mean that I have been p-paying my addresses, as the phrase is. . . ."

"And taking receipts?"

"Exactly—and taking receipts, without first asking her father's leave. And if I say no——"

"If you say no, my dear young man, her father will merely ask you to help yourself and pass the port (decanter with the little brass ticket—yes, that one. Thank you!). Well, I see what you mean, and we needn't construct enigmas. We really get to the point. Now tell me all about it." We don't feel at all sure the Professor's way of getting to the point was not a good one. You see, he had had a good deal to do with young men in early academical phases of existence—tutorships and the like—and had no idea of humming and hawing and stuttering over their affairs. Besides, it was best for Bradshaw, as was shown by the greater ease with which he went on speaking, and began telling the Professor all about it.

"I shouldn't be speaking truthfully, sir, if I were to pretend things haven't gone a little beyond—a little beyond—the exact rules. But you've no idea how easily one can deceive oneself."

"Haven't I?" The Professor's mind went back to his own youth. He knew very well how easily he had done it. A swift dream of his past shot through his brain in the little space before Bradshaw resumed.

"Well, it was only a phrase. Of course you know. I mean it has all crept on so imperceptibly. And I have had no real chance of talking about it—to *you*, sir—without asking for a formal interview. And until very lately nothing Læt—Miss Wilson . . ."

"Tut-tut! Lætitia—Lætitia. What's the use of being prigs about it?"

"Nothing Lætitia has said would have warranted me in doing this. I *could* have introduced the subject to Mrs. Wilson once or twice, but . . ."

"All right. I understand. Well, now, what's the exact state of things between you and Lætitia?"

"You will guess what our wishes are. But we know quite

well that their fulfilment is at present impossible. It may remain so. I have no means at present except a small salary. And my mother and sister——”

“Have a claim on you—is that it?” The Professor’s voice seems to forestall a forbidding sound. But he won’t be in too great a hurry. He continues: “You must have some possibility in view, some sort of expectation.”

Bradshaw’s reply hesitated a good deal.

“I am afraid I have—I am afraid—allowed myself to fancy—that, in short, I might be able to—outgrow this unhappy nervous affection.”

“And then?”

“I know what you mean, Professor Wilson. You mean that a violinist’s position, however successful, would be less than you have a right to expect for your daughter’s husband. Of course that is so, but——”

“But I mean nothing of the sort.” The Professor is abrupt and decisive, as one who repudiates. “I know nothing about positions. However, Mr. Bradshaw, you are quite right this far—that is what Mrs. Wilson would have meant. *She* knows about positions. What *I* meant was that you wouldn’t have enough to live upon at the best, in any comfort, and that I shouldn’t be able to help you. Suppose you had a large family, and the nervous affection came back?” His hearer quakes at this crude, unfeeling forecast of real matrimonial facts. He and Lætitia fully recognise in theory that people who marry incur families; but, like every other young couple, would prefer a veil drawn over their particular case. The young man flinches visibly at the Professor’s needlessly savage hypothesis of disasters. Had he been a rapid and skilful counsel in his own behalf, he would have at once pounced on a weak point, and asked how many couples would ever get married at all, if we were to beg and borrow every trouble the proper people (whoever they are) are ready to give away and lend. He can only look crestfallen, and feel about in his mind for some way of saying, “If I wanted Lætitia to promise to marry me, that would apply. As matters stand, it is not to the purpose,” without seeming to indite the Professor for prematureness. Of course, the position had been created entirely by the Dragon. Why could she not

have let them alone, as her husband had said to her? Why not, indeed?

But Master Julius has to see his way out into the open, and he is merely looking puzzled, and letting a very fair cigar out—and, you know, they are never the same thing relighted. Perhaps what he does is as good as anything else.

“I see you are right, sir, and I am afraid I am to blame—I must be—because my selfish thoughtlessness, or whatever it ought to be called, has placed us in a position out of which no happiness can result for either?” He looks interrogatively into the Professor’s gold spectacles, but sees no relaxation in the slightly knitted brow above them. Their owner merely nods.

“But you needn’t take all the blame to yourself,” he says. “I’ve no doubt my daughter is entitled to her share of it”—to which Bradshaw tries to interpose a denial—“only it really doesn’t matter whose fault it is.”

The disconcerted lover, who felt all raw, public, and uncomfortable, wondered a little what the precise “it” was that could be said to be any one’s fault. After all, he and Lætitia were just two persons going on existing, and how could it be any concern of any one else’s what each thought of or felt for the other? It is true he lacked absolution for the kissing transgressions; they were blots on a clean sheet of mere friendship. But would the Dragon be content that he and Lætitia should continue to see each other if they signed a solemn agreement that there was to be no kissing? You see, he was afraid he was going to be cut off from his lady-love, and he didn’t like the looks of the Professor. But he didn’t propose the drawing up of any such compact. Perhaps he didn’t feel prepared to sign it. However, he was to be relieved from any immediate anxiety. The Professor had never meant to take any responsibility, and now that he had said his say, he only wanted to wash his hands of it.

“Now, understand me, Bradshaw,” said he—and there was leniency and hope in the dropped “Mr.”—“I do not propose to do more than advise; nor do I know, as my daughter is twenty-four, what I can do except advise. We won’t bring authority into court. . . . Oh yes, no doubt Lætitia believes she will never act against my wishes. Many girls have thought that sort of thing. But——” He stopped dead, with a little side-twist of

the head, and a lip-pinch, expressing doubt, then resumed: "So I'll give you my advice, and you can think it over. It is that you young people just keep out of each other's way, and let the thing die out. You've no idea till you try what a magical effect absence has; poetry is all gammon. Take my advice, and try it. Have some more port? No—thank me! Then let's go upstairs."

Upstairs were to be found all the materials for an uncomfortable evening. A sort of wireless telegraphy that passed between Bradshaw and Lætitia left both in low spirits. They did not rise (the spirits) when the Professor said, to the public generally, "Well, I must say good-night, but *you* needn't go," and went away to his study; nor when his Dragon followed him, with a strong flavour of discipline on her. For thereupon it became necessary to ignore conflict in the hinterland of some folding-doors, accompanied by sounds of forbearance and a high moral attitude. There was no remedy but music, and as soon as Bradshaw got at his Stradivarius the mists seemed to disperse. The *adagio* of Somebody's quartette No. 101 seemed to drive a coach-and-six through mortal bramble-labyrinths. But as soon as it ceased, the mists came back all the thicker for being kept waiting. And the outcome of a winding-up interview between the sweet-hearts was the conclusion that after what had been said by the father of one of them, it was necessary that all should be forgotten, and be as though it had never been. And the gentleman next day, when he showed himself at his desk at Cattley's, provoked the remark that Paganini had got the hump this morning—which shows that his genius as a violinist was recognised at Cattley's.

As for the lady, we rather think she made up her mind in the course of the night that if her family were going to interfere with her love-affairs, she would let them know what it was to have people yearning for other people in the house. For she refused boiled eggs, eggs and bacon, cold salmon-trout, and potted tongue at breakfast next day, and left half a piece of toast and half a cup of tea as a visible record that she had started pining, and meant to do it in earnest.

What Lætitia and Julius suffered during their self-inflicted separation, Heaven only knows! This saying must be interpreted as meaning that nobody else did. They were like evasive

Trappist monks, who profess mortification of the flesh, but when it comes to the scratch, don't flog fair. Whatever they lost in the cessation of uncomfortable communion at the eyrie, or lair, of the Dragon was more than made up for by the sub-rosaceous, or semi-clandestine, character of the intercourse that was left. Stolen kisses are notoriously sweetest, but when, in addition to this, every one is actually the very last the shareholders intend to subscribe for, their fascination is increased tenfold. And every accidental or purely unintentionally arranged meeting of these two had always the character of an interview between people who never meet—which, like most truths, was only false in exceptional cases; and in this instance these were numerous. Factitious absence of this sort will often make the heart grow fonder, where the real thing would make it look about for another; and another is generally to be found.

It might have been unsafe to indulge in speculation, based on the then *status quo*, as to when the inevitable was going to happen. We know all about it now, but that doesn't count. Stories, true or false, should be told consecutively.

