

THE COMMON LOT.¹

IV.

THE next morning Jackson Hart was at work once more on the plans for the Denver hotel. Now that he knew his fate, the draughting-room under the great skylights of the Dearborn Building seemed like a prison. The men in the office, he felt sure, had read all about the will, and had had their say upon his affairs before he had come in. He could tell that from the additional nonchalance in the manner of the head draughtsman, Cook. Early in the afternoon a welcome interruption came to him in the shape of an urgent call from the electricians working on the Canostota apartment house on the South Side. The head of the office asked Hart to go to the Canostota and straighten the men out, as Harmon, their engineer, was at home ill.

As Jackson crossed the street to take the elevated he met his cousin. They walked together to the station, and as Wheeler was turning away, the architect broke out:—

"I've been thinking over uncle's will. I can't say I think it was fair—to treat me like that after—after all these years."

The lawyer smiled coldly.

"We both got the same deal," he remarked.

"Well, that don't make it any better; besides, you have had as good as money from him long ago. Your position and mine aren't just the same."

"No, that's so," the lawyer admitted. "But what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know yet. I want to think it over. How long"—he started to ask.

"How long have you to give notice you want to contest? About three weeks," Wheeler replied coolly. "Of course, you know that if you fight, you'll put your

mother's legacy in danger. And I guess Hollister and the judge would fight."

"And you?"

Wheeler shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I suppose I should stick with the others."

Then Wheeler nodded and was off down the street. He was as much disturbed as if his cousin had told him it was going to rain on the morrow. Hart continued on his way to the Canostota. There he found the foreman for the electrical contractor, and spent a busy hour explaining to the man the intricacies of the office blue prints. Then the steam-fitter got hold of him, and it was nearly five o'clock before he had time to think of himself or his own affairs. As he emerged from the basement by a hole left in the floor for the plumbers and steam-fitters to run their pipes through, he noticed a section of the fireproof partition which had been accidentally knocked out. Through this hole he could see one of the steel I-beams that supported the flooring above, where it had been drilled to admit the passing of a steam pipe. Something unusual in the thickness of the metal caught his eye, and he paused where he was, halfway out of the basement, to look at it again. The I-beam seemed unaccountably thin. He was not quite familiar, even yet, with the material side of building in America; but he knew in a general way the weights of steel beams that were ordinarily specified in Wright's office for buildings of this size.

"How's this, Davidson?" he asked the steam-fitter, who was close at his heels. "Is n't that a pretty light fifteen-inch I-beam?"

The workman looked absolutely blank.

"I dunno. I expect it's what's called for."

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Even if the man had known all about it, he would have said nothing. It was silly to ask a subcontractor to give evidence damaging to his employer. The architect stooped, and asked the man to hand him his rule. As he was trying to measure the section of steel, he saw a man's face looking down at him from the floor above. Presently a burly form appeared in the opening. It was Graves, who was the general contractor for the building.

"We haven't begun to patch up the tile yet," the contractor observed, nodding to the architect. "We thought we'd leave it open here and there until Mr. Harmon could get around and look into things. I'm expecting Mr. Wright will be out here the first of the week, too."

The contractor talked slowly, without taking his eyes from Hart. He was a large, full-bearded man, with a manner self-confident or assuming, as one chose to take it. Hart was always at a loss how to treat a man like Graves, — whether as a kind of upper workman to be ordered about, or as a social equal.

"Is that so?" he asked in a noncommittal tone. "Mr. Harmon has n't been out here much of late?"

"No, sir. It must be three weeks or more since Mr. Harmon was here last. He's been sick that long, ain't he?"

The steam-fitter had slipped away. Hart had it on his lips to ask the contractor to show him the specifications for the steel work. Graves kept his cool gray eyes fastened on the young architect, while he said: —

"That's why I've been keeping things back, so as Mr. Wright could satisfy himself that everything was all right. A terribly particular man, that Mr. Wright. If you can please him!"

He was studying the young man before him, and very ably supplying answers to the architect's doubts before he could express them. The contractor did not pause to give Hart time to think, but

kept a stream of his slow, confident words flowing over the architect.

"You fellows give us a lot of bother. Now take that tile. Mr. Wright specifies Caper's A1, which happens to be out of the market just now. To please him I sent to Cleveland and Buffalo for some odds and ends they had down there. But there are a dozen makes just as good!"

He spoke like a man who did always a little more than his duty. Although the architect was conscious of the skillful manner in which his attention was being switched from the steel beams, he felt inclined to trust the contractor.

Graves was not one of the larger contractors employed on the firm's buildings. He had worked up from small beginnings as a master mason. Wright had used him on several little commissions, and had always found him eager to do his best. This was the first job of any considerable size that Graves had done for the firm, and he had got this by underbidding considerably all the other general contractors who had been invited to bid on the work. These facts Hart did not happen to know.

"Are you going north, Mr. Hart?" Graves asked, as they turned to the street entrance. "My team is just outside. Shall be pleased to give you a lift."

Speaking thus he ushered the architect from the Canostota where the dusk was already falling.

The contractor's horse was a nervous, fast little beast. The light runabout whirled into the broad avenue of Grand Boulevard, and there Graves let the animal out for a couple of blocks. A thin smile of satisfaction wrinkled the contractor's bearded lips. Then he pulled on the reins, and turned in his seat to face the architect.

"I'm glad of this chance to see you, Mr. Hart," he began pleasantly. "I have been thinking lately that we might be of some use to each other."

He paused to let his words sink into

his companion's mind. Then he resumed in a reflective manner : —

"I ain't content to build just for other folks. I want to put up something on my own account. Oh, nothing like as fine as that Canostota, but something pretty and attractive, and something that will pay. I've just the lot for it, out south alongside Washington Park. It's a peach! A corner and two hundred feet. Say! Why won't you come out right now and have a look at it? Can you spare the time? Good."

The little runabout whisked around, and they went speeding south over the hard boulevard.

"Now 's about the time to build. I've owned the property ever since the slump in real estate right after the fair. Well, I want an architect on my own account! I suppose I could go to one of those Jews who sell their dinky little blue prints by the yard. Most of the flat buildings hereabouts come that way. But I want something *swell*. That's going to be a fine section of the city soon, and looks count in a building, as elsewhere."

Hart laughed at this cordial testimony to his art.

"There's your boss, Wright. But he's too high-toned for me, — would n't look at anything that toted up less than the six figures. And I guess he don't do much designing himself. He leaves that to you young fellows!"

Hart could see, now, the idea that was in the contractor's mind. They pulled up near the south corner of the Park, beside some vacant land. It was, as Graves said, a very favorable spot for a showy apartment building.

"I want something real handsome," the contractor continued. "It'll be a high-priced building. And I think *you* are the man to do it."

Graves brought this out like a shot.

"Why, I should like to think of it," the architect began conventionally, not sure what he ought to say.

"Yes, you're the man. I saw the

plans for that Aurora church one day while I was waiting to talk with Mr. Wright, and I said to myself then, 'There's the man to draw *my* plans. That feller's got something out of the ordinary in him! He's got style!'"

Praise, even from the mob, is honey to the artist. Hart instinctively thought better of the self-confident contractor, and decided that he was a bluff, honest man, — common, but well meaning.

"Well, what do you say, Mr. Hart?"

It ended with Hart's practically agreeing to prepare a preliminary sketch. When it came to the matter of business, the young architect found that, notwithstanding the contractor's high consideration of his talent, he was willing to offer only the very lowest terms for his work. He told the contractor that he should have to leave Wright's office before undertaking the commission.

"But," he said with a sudden rush of will, "I was considering starting for myself very soon, anyway."

It was not until after the contractor had dropped him at his club in the down-town district that he remembered the steel beams in the Canostota. Then it occurred to him that possibly, had it not been for the accident which had brought Graves to that part of the building just as he was on his knees trying to measure the thickness of the metal, the contractor might not have discovered his great talent. As he entered the club washroom, the disagreeable thought came to him that, if the I-beams were not right, Graves had rather cleverly closed his mouth about the Canostota. In agreeing to do a piece of work for Wright's contractor, he had placed himself where he could not easily get that contractor into trouble with his present employer.

As he washed his hands, scrubbing them as if they had been wood to remove the afternoon's dirt, he felt that there was more than one kind of grime in the city.

V.

There were very few men to be found in the club at this hour. The dingy library, buzzing like a beehive at noon with young men, was empty now except for a stranger who was whiling away his time before meeting a dinner engagement. The men that the architect met at this club were, like himself, younger members of the professions, struggling up in the crowded ranks of law, medicine, architecture. Others were in brokers' offices, or engaged in general business. Some of them had been his classmates in Cornell, or in the technological school, and these had welcomed him with a little dinner on his return from Paris.

After that cheerful reunion he had seen less of these old friends than he had hoped to, when he had contemplated Chicago from his Paris apartment. Perhaps there had been something of envy among them for Jackson Hart. Things had seemed very pleasantly shaped for him, and Chicago is yet a community that resents special favors.

Every one was driving himself at top speed. At noon the men fell together about the same table in the grill-room, — worried, fagged, preoccupied. As soon as the day's work was over, their natural instinct was to flee from the dirt and noise of the business street, where the club was situated, to the cleaner quarters north or south, or to the semi-rural suburbs. Thus the centrifugal force of the city was irresistible.

To-night there were a number of men in the cardroom, sitting over a game of poker, which, judging from the ash-trays about them, had been in progress since luncheon. Several other men with hats on and coats over their arms were standing about the table looking on.

"Well, Jackie, my boy!" one of the players called out, "where have you been hiding yourself this week?"

Ben Harris, the man who hailed the architect, had apparently been drinking a good deal. The other men at the table called out sharply, "Shut up, Ben. Play!"

But the voluble Harris, whose drink had made him more than usually impudent, remarked further: —

"Say, Jack! ain't you learned yet that we don't pattern after the German Emperor here in Chicago? Better comb out your mustache, or they'll be taking you for some foreign guy."

Hart merely turned his back on Harris, and listened with exaggerated interest to what a large, heavy man, with a boy's smooth face, was saying: —

"He was of no special 'count in college, — a kind of second-rate hustler, you know. But, my heavens! Since he struck this town, he's got in his work. I don't believe he knows enough law to last him over night. But he knows how to make the right men think he does. He started in to work for those Selinas Mills people. — damage suits and collecting. Here in less than five years he's drawing the papers for the consolidation of all the paper mills in the country!"

"Who's that, Billy?" Hart asked.

"Leverett, Joe Leverett. He was Yale '89, and at the law school with me."

"He must have the right stuff in him," commented one man.

"I don't know about that!" the first speaker retorted. "Some kind of stuff, of course. But I said he was no lawyer, and never will be, and I repeat it. And what's more, half the men who are earning the big money in law here in Chicago don't know enough law to try a case properly."

"That's so," assented one man.

"Same thing in medicine."

"Oh, it's the same all over."

The men about the card-table launched out into a heated discussion of the one great topic — Success. The game of poker finally closed, and the players joined in the conversation. Fresh drinks

were ordered, and cigars were passed about. The topic caught the man most eager to go home, and fired the brain most fagged.

"The pity of it, too," said the large man called Billy, dominating the room with his deep voice and his deliberate speech, — "the pity of it is that it ruins the professions. You can see it right here in Chicago. Who cares for fine professional work, if it don't bring in the stuff? Look at our courts! Yes, look at our doctors! And look at our buildings! It's money every time. The professions are commercialized."

"Oh, Billy!" exclaimed Ben Harris. "Is this a commencement oration you are giving us?"

A quiet voice broke in from behind the circle: —

"There's much in what you say, Mr. Blount. Time has been when it meant something of honor for a man to be a member of one of the learned professions. Men were content to take part of their pay in honor and respect from the community. There's no denying that's all changed now. We measure everything by one yardstick, and that is money. So, the able lawyer and the able doctor have joined the race with the mob for the dollars. But" — his eye seemed to rest on the young architect, who was listening attentively — "that state of affairs can't go on. When we shake down in this modern world of ours, and have got used to our wealth, and have made the right adjustment between capital and labor, — the professions, the learned professions, will be elevated once more. Men are so made that they want to respect something. And in the long run they will respect learning, ideas, and devotion to the public weal."

"That's all right, Pemberton," Harris retorted. "That's first-class talk. But I guess I see about as much of human nature in my business as any man, and I tell you, it's only human nature to get what you can out of the

game. What men respect in this town is money, — first, last, and all the time. So it's only natural for a man, whether he is a lawyer or anything else, to do as the other Romans do."

Harris brought his bony, lined hand down on the card-table with a thump, and leaned forward, thrusting out his long, unshaven chin at the older man who had spoken. His black hair, which was thin above the temples and across the middle of his head, was rumped, his collar bent, and his cuffs blackened about the edges. Hart had known him as a boy twelve years before at the South Side High School. From the University of Michigan Harris had entered a broker's office, and had made money on the Board of Trade. Lately it had been reported that he was losing money in wheat.

"Yes, sir," he snarled on, having suppressed the others for the moment. "It don't make much difference, either, how you get your money so far as I can see. Whether you do a man in a corner in wheat, or run a pool room. All is, if you want to be in the game, you must have the price of admission about you. And the rest is talk for the ladies and the young."

The older man, Pemberton, said in a severe tone: —

"That is easy to say and easy to believe. But when I think of the magnificent gift to the public just made by one of these very men whom you would consider a mere money-grabber, I confess I am obliged to doubt your easy analysis of our modern life!"

Pemberton spoke with a kind of authority. He was one of the older men of the club, much respected in the city, and perfectly fearless. But the broker, also, feared no man's opinion.

"Gifts to education!" sneered Ben Harris. "That's what they do to show off when they're through with their goods. Anyway, there's too much education going around. It don't count.

The only thing that counts, to-day, here, now, is money. Can you make it or steal it or—inherit it!”

He looked at Jackson Hart and laughed. The architect disliked this vulgar reference to his own situation, but, on the whole, he was inclined to agree with the broker.

“I am sorry that such ideas should be expressed inside this club,” Pemberton answered gravely. “If there is one place in this city where the old ideals of the professions should be revered, where men should deny that cheap philosophy of the street, by their acts as well as by their words, it should be here in this club.”

Some of the other men nodded their approval of this speech. They said nothing, however; for the conversation had reached a point of delicacy that made men hesitate to say what they thought. Pemberton turned on his heel and walked away. The irrepressible Harris called after him belligerently:—

“Oh, I don’t know about that, now, Mr. Pemberton. It takes all kinds of men to make a club, you know.”

The little group broke up. Harris linked his arm in Hart’s.

“I’ve got something to say to you, Jackie,” he said boisterously. “We’ll order some dinner, if you are free, and I’ll put you up to something that’s better than old Pemberton’s talk. It just occurred to me while we were gassing here.”

The young architect did not quite like Harris’s style, but he had planned to dine at the club, and they went upstairs to the dining-room together. He was curious to hear what the broker might have to suggest to him.

Hart had agreed with Pemberton’s ideas, naturally enough, in the abstract. But in the concrete, the force of circumstances, here in this roaring city where he found himself caught, was fast preparing him to accept the Harris view. He was neither an idealist nor a weak

man: he was merely a young man, still, making up his character as he went along, and taking color more or less from the landscape he found himself in.

His aspirations for art, if not fine, were sufficiently earnest and sincere. He had thought of himself as luckily fortunated, so that he could devote himself to getting real distinction in his profession. So in Paris. Now, brought back from that pleasant world into this stern city, with all its striving, apparently, centred upon the one business of making money, then deprived by what seemed to him a harsh and unfair freak of fortune of all his pleasant expectations, he was trying to read the face of Destiny. And there he seemed to find written what this gritty broker had harshly expressed.

“Say, you’ve got a good friend in Mrs. Will Phillips,” Harris began bluntly when they were seated opposite each other.

Hart remembered that he had not followed the widow’s invitation to call upon her, all thought of her having been driven out of his mind by the happenings of the last few days.

“How do you know?” he asked.

“Oh, I know all right. She’s a good customer of ours. I’ve been talking to her half the afternoon about things.”

His next remark had nothing to do with Mrs. Phillips.

“You fellows don’t make much money building houses. Ain’t that so? You need other jobs. Well, I am going to give you a pointer.”

He stopped mysteriously, and then began again:—

“I happen to know that the C. R. & N. Road is going to put a lot of money into improvements this summer. Among other things they’re getting ready to build new stations all along the north line,—you know, up through the suburbs,—Forest Park, Shoreham, and so on. They’ve got a lot of swell patronage out that way, and they are making ready for more.”

Hart listened to the broker intently. He wondered why Harris should happen to know this news ahead of the general public, and he tried to think how it might help his fortune.

"That's where they are going to put a lot of their surplus earnings. Now, those stations must be the top of the style, — real buildings, not sheds. I don't think they have any architect."

"Oh!" objected Hart, disappointed. "The president or one of the vice presidents will have a son, or nephew, or some one to work in. Or, perhaps, they will have a competitive trial for the plans."

"Perhaps they will, and perhaps they won't," Harris answered knowingly. "The man who will decide all that is their first vice president, — Raymond, Colonel Stevens P. Raymond, — know him?"

Hart shook his head.

"Well, Mrs. Phillips does. He lives out in Forest Park, where she's thinking of building a big house."

"Is Mrs. Phillips thinking of building in Forest Park?" the architect asked.

Harris looked at him in a bored manner.

"Why, I thought you were going to draw the plans!"

"She asked me to come to see her," Hart admitted. "But that was all."

"Well, if a rich and good-looking woman asks you to call, I should n't take all year about making up my mind."

Hart could not help thinking that it would be harder to go to Mrs. Phillips now than if he had not had this talk with the broker. Their meeting in Paris had been pleasant, unalloyed with business. He remembered how he had rather patronized the ambitious young woman, who had desired to meet artists, to go to their studios, and to have little dinners where every one talked French but her stupid husband.

"The widow Phillips thinks a lot of your ability, Jackie, and old S. P. R.

thinks a lot of the widow. Now do you see?"

The architect laughed nervously. He could see plainly enough what was meant, but he did not like it altogether.

"She can do what she likes with the old man. The job is as good as yours, if you do the proper thing. I've given you the tip straight ahead of the whole field. Not a soul knows that the C. R. & N. is going in for this kind of thing."

"It will be a big chance," the architect replied. "It was good of you to think of me, Ben."

"That's all right. It popped into my head when that ass Pemberton began his talk about your uncle's gift to the public. I must say, it seemed to me a dirty trick of the old man to cut you out the way he did. Are you going to fight the will, or is it so fixed that you can't?"

"I don't know, yet."

"To bring a fellow up as he did you, and then knock on him at the end, — it's just low-down."

That was the view Jackson Hart was more and more inclined to take of his uncle's will, and he warmed to the coarse, outspoken broker, who had shown him real friendliness. Harris seemed to him to be warm-blooded and human. The young architect was beginning to feel that this was not a world for delicacy of motive and refinement. When Hart suggested diffidently that some large firm of architects would probably be chosen by the C. R. & N. people, Harris said: —

"Rats! Raymond won't hunt round for references, beyond what Mrs. Phillips will give him. You see her as quick as you can, and tell her you want the chance."

The opportunity which Harris had suggested would be given to him by a woman. Yet, however much he might dislike to go to a woman for such help, the chance began to loom large in his imagination. Here was something that Wright himself would be glad to have. He saw himself in his own office, having two

large commissions to start with, and possibly a third, — Mrs. Phillips's new house in Forest Park.

Perhaps Wright did know, after all, about the C. R. & N. matter. Hart's fighting blood rose: he would do his best to snatch the good thing from him, or from any other architect! He forgot his contempt for that American habit of pull, which he had much deplored in studio discussions. All that had been theory; this was personal and practical.

Within the day Fortune had smiled upon him twice. Neither time, to be sure, was the way to her favor quite what he would have chosen if he could have chosen. But one must not discriminate too nicely when one picks up the cards to play. . . .

Below, from the busy street, rose the piercing note of the city, — rattle, roar, and clang, scarcely less shrill at eight of an evening than at noon. From the bulkheads on the roof of the next building soared a drab-colored cloud of steam, eddying upwards even to the open windows of the club dining-room. The noise, the smell, the reek of the city touched the man, folded him in, swayed him like a subtle opiate. The thirst of the terrible game of living, the desire of things, the brute love of triumph filled his veins. Old Powers Jackson, contemptuously putting him to one side, had unconsciously worked this state of mind in him. He, Jackson Hart, would show the world that he could fight for himself, could snatch the prize that every one was fighting for, the prize of man's life, — a little pot of gold!

VI.

"How did young Mr. Hart take the news of the will?" Mrs. Phillips asked her brother-in-law the first time she saw him after the funeral.

"Why, all right, I guess," the judge answered slowly. "Why should n't he?"

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"I hoped he would fight it," the widow replied, eyeing the judge calmly.

"I believe he is n't that much of a fool. Just because Powers looked after his mother, and fed him all these years, and gave him an expensive education, — why should he be obliged to leave the chap all his money, if he did n't want to?"

Mrs. Phillips avoided a direct reply, and continued to announce her opinions, — a method of conversation which she knew was highly irritating to the judge.

"Philanthropy! What's the use of such philanthropy? The city has enough schools. It's all foolishness to give your money to other people to eat up!"

"That is a matter of feeling," Judge Phillips answered dryly. "I should n't expect you to feel as Powers did about such things."

Harrison Phillips had few illusions concerning his sister-in-law, and she knew it. Years before they had reached the point where they dispensed with polite subterfuges. He had known her ever since she came to Chicago from a little Illinois town to study music. Indeed, he had first introduced his younger brother to her, he remembered unhappily. She was Louise Faunce, then, — a keen, brown-eyed country girl of eighteen. When Will Phillips wanted to marry her, the judge had already felt the girl's little claws, and had been foolish enough to warn his brother. Will Phillips was a dull young man, and had poor health. The older brother knew that Will was being married for his money, — a considerable fortune for a girl from Otumwa, Illinois.

And the marriage had not been a happy one. The last years of his life Will Phillips had taken to drinking. The judge felt that the wife had driven his brother to his sodden end, and he hated her for it, with a proper and legal hatred. The last six months of her husband's life, Mrs. Phillips had spent in Europe with her two children. Why she had chosen to return to Chicago after her

husband's death was a mystery to the judge, who never gave Louise Phillips credit for half her character.

She told him that she had found Europe an unsuitable place in which to bring up the children, and proposed to build a new house, perhaps in Forest Park, — one of the older and more desirable suburbs to the north of the city.

"I must make a home for my children among their father's friends," she said to the judge with perfect propriety. "Venetia, especially, should have the right background."

Venetia, so named in one of the rare accesses of sentiment which came to Mrs. Phillips, as to all mortals, was now sixteen years old. Her brother Stanwood, a year younger, had been placed in a fashionable Eastern school, where he was preparing for Yale, and ultimately for the "career of diplomacy," as his mother called it.

The judge had been discussing to-day his sister-in-law's intentions in regard to the new house, and she had notified him that she should need presently a large amount of money.

"If you will wait," she remarked, having exhausted her opinion about philanthropy and Powers Jackson's will, "you might see my architect. I have asked Mr. Hart to call this afternoon."

"I don't pine to see him," the old man retorted testily. "So you have gone that far?"

"Yes! There is n't the slightest use of being disagreeable about it, you see. Nothing that you can say will change my mind. It never has. You would like to keep me from spending the money. But you can't without a row, a scandal. Besides, it's a good investment for both the children."

"You were always pretty keen for a good investment!"

"You mean by that sarcasm that you think I was sharp when I married your brother, because I had nothing but my good looks. They were worth more than

a husband — who — drank himself — to death."

"We won't go into that, please," the judge said, his bright blue eyes glittering. "I hope, Louise, to live to see the day when you get what you deserve, — just how I don't know."

"Thank you, Harrison," Mrs. Phillips replied unperturbed. "We all do get what we deserve, sooner or later, don't we?"

"Sometimes I give up hope!"

"There's my young man now!" she exclaimed, looking out of the window. "If you want to know just what extravagances I am going into, you had better wait."

"I'll know soon enough! Where's Ven? I want to see her."

"She should be out riding with John."

Mrs. Phillips rose from her deep chair to greet the architect. All at once her face and manner seemed to change from the hard, cold surface that she had presented to the judge, the surface of a middle-aged, shrewd woman. Suddenly she expanded, opened herself graciously to the young man.

The old gentleman stalked out of the drawing-room, with a curt nod and a grunt for Hart. The architect looked to the widow for an explanation of the stormy atmosphere, but she smiled a warm welcome, ignoring the judge.

"So good of you to answer my note promptly," she murmured. "For I know how busy you are!"

"I had already promised myself the pleasure," Hart replied quickly, using a phrase he had thought up on his way into the room.

As he looked at her resting in her deep chair, he realized that it was a distinct pleasure to be there. In Chicago Mrs. Will Phillips was much more of a person than she had been in Paris. Still, the woman in her was the first and last fact. She was thirty-seven, and in the very best of health. To one who did not

lay exclusive emphasis on mere youth, the first bloom of the fruit, she was much more beautiful than when she married Willie Phillips. Sensitive, nervous, in the full tide of her physical life, she had, what is euphemistically called to-day, temperament. To this instinctive side of the woman, the handsome, strong, young man had always appealed.

It is also true that she was clever, and had learned with great rapidity how to cover up the holes of a wretched education. At first, however, a man could think of but one thing in the presence of Mrs. Phillips:—

“You are a woman, and a very pretty one!”

Doubtless she meant that men should think that, and nothing more, at first. Those who had come through the fire, to whom she was cold and hard, like an inferior gem, might say with the judge:—

“Louise flings her sex at you from the first smile. The only thing to do is to run.”

Jackson Hart had not yet reached this point of experience. He was but dimly aware that the woman opposite him troubled his mind, preoccupied, as it happened to be, with business, like a too pronounced perfume. Here, in the hard atmosphere of an American city, he was not inclined to remember the sentimentalities of his Paris days. Accordingly, Mrs. Phillips, with quick perception, dropped the reminiscential tone that she had been inclined to take. She came promptly to business:—

“Could you consider a small commission, Mr. Hart?” she asked with apparent hesitation.

The architect would have undertaken to build a doll’s house. Nevertheless, his heart sank at the word “small.”

“I so much want your advice, at any rate. I value your taste so highly. You taught me how to look at things over there. And we should agree, should n’t we?”

Then she unfolded more plainly her

purpose of building in Forest Park. She had thought of something Tudor. (She had been visiting at a Tudor house in the East.) But the architect, without debating the point, sketched on the back of an envelope the outline of an old French château, — a toy study in part of the famous château at Chenonceaux.

“What a lovely roof!” Mrs. Phillips exclaimed responsively. “And how the thing grows under your hand! It seems as if you must have had me in mind for a long time.” She leaned over the little piece of paper, fascinated by the architect’s facility.

As he drew in the façade, he noticed that the widow had very lovely hair, of a tone rarely found in America, between brown and black, dusky. He remembered that he had made the same observation before in Paris. The arch of her neck, which was strong and full, was also excellent. And her skin had a perfect pallor.

By the time he had made these observations and finished his rough little sketch, the Tudor period had been forgotten, and the question of the commission had been really decided. There remained to be debated the matter of cost. After one or two tactful feints the architect was forced to ask bluntly what the widow expected to spend on the house. At the mention of money Mrs. Phillips’s brows contracted slightly. A trace of hardness, like fine enamel, stole across her features.

“What could you build it for?” she demanded brusquely.

“Why, on a thing like this you can spend what you like,” he stammered. “Of course a house in Forest Park ought to be of a certain kind, — to be a good investment,” he added politely.

“Of course. Would twenty-five thousand dollars do?”

The architect felt relieved on hearing the size of the figure, but he had had time to realize that this agreeable client might be close in money matters. It would be

well to have her mind keyed to a liberal figure at the start, and he said boldly: —

“You could do a good deal for that. But not a place like this. Such a one as you ought to have, Mrs. Phillips,” he added, appealing to her vanity.

Once he had called her Louise, and they both were conscious of the fact. She eyed him keenly. She was quite well aware that he wanted to get all the freedom to develop his sketch that a good sum of money would give, and also had in mind the size of his fee, which would be a percentage of the cost. But this did not offend her. In this struggle, mental and polite, over the common topic of money, she expected him to do his best.

“It’s no use being small in such matters,” she conceded at length. “Let us say fifty thousand!”

“That’s much more possible!” the architect replied buoyantly, with a vague idea already forming that his sketches might call for a house that would cost seventy or seventy-five thousand dollars to complete.

The money matter out of the way, the widow relapsed into her friendly manner.

“I hope you can begin right away! I am so anxious to get out of this old barn, and I want to unpack all the treasures I’ve bought in Europe this last time.”

Judge Phillips would have shuddered to hear his brother’s large brick house, with its neat strip of encircling green lawn, in Chicago fashion, referred to as a barn. And the architect, on his side, knowing something of Louise Phillips’s indiscriminate taste in antiquities, was resolved to cull the “treasures” before they found a place in his edifice.

“Why, I’ll begin on some sketches right away. If they please you, I could do the plans at once — just as soon as I get my own office,” he added honestly. “You know I have been working for Walker, Post & Wright. But I am going to leave them very soon.”

“Yes,” Mrs. Phillips replied sympathetically. “I know it ought to have been so different. I think that will be disgraceful! I hope you can break it.”

“I don’t know that I shall try,” he answered hastily, startled at the widow’s cool comment on his uncle’s purposes.

“Well, you know best, I suppose. But I should think a long time before I let them build that school.”

“I shall see. At any rate, it looks now as if I should want all the work I can get,” he said, looking into her eyes, and thinking of what Harris had told him of the C. R. & N. job. He had it on his lips to add, “Can’t you say a word for me to your friend Colonel Raymond?” But he could not bring himself to the point of asking outright for business favors at a woman’s hand.

However, she happily saved him from the crudity of open speech.

“Perhaps I can help you. There’s something — Well, we won’t begin on that to-day. But you can rest assured that I am your friend, can’t you?”

They understood each other thus easily. He knew that she was well aware of what was in his mind, and was disposed to help him to the full extent of her woman’s power. In his struggle for money and place, — things that she appreciated, — she would be an able friend.

Having come to a complete agreement on many matters, in the manner of a man and a woman, they began to talk of Paris and of other days. Outside in the hall there was the sound of steps, and a laughing, vigorous girl’s voice. The architect could see a thin, tall girl, as she threw her arms about Judge Phillips’s plump neck and pulled his head to a level with her mouth. He noticed that Mrs. Phillips was also watching this scene with stealthy eyes. When the door had closed upon the judge, she called: —

“Venetia, will you come here, dear. I want you to meet Mr. Hart. You remember Mr. Hart?”

The girl crossed the drawing-room slowly, the fire in her strangely extinguished. She gave a bony little hand to the architect, and nodded her head, like a rebellious trick dog. Then she drew away from the two and stood beside the table, waiting for the next order.

She was dark like her mother, but her features lacked the widow's pleasant curves. They were firm and square, and a pair of dark eyes looked out moodily from under heavy eyebrows. The short red lips were full and curved, while the mother's lips were dangerously thin and straight. As the architect looked at the girl, standing tall and erect at the table, he felt that she was destined to be of some importance. It was also plain that she and her mother were not sympathetic. When her mother spoke, the daughter seemed to listen with the terrible criticism of youth lurking in her eyes.

A close observer would have seen, also, that the girl had in her a capacity for passion that the mother altogether lacked. The woman was mildly sensuous and physical in mood, but totally without the strong emotions that might sweep her to any act, mindless of fate. When the clash came between the two, the mother would be the one to retreat.

"Have you had your ride, dear?" Mrs. Phillips asked in soothing tones, carefully prepared for the public.

"No, mamma. Uncle Harry was here, you know."

"I am sorry not to have you take your ride every day, no matter what happens," the mother continued, as if she had not heard the girl's excuse.

"I had rather see uncle Harry. Besides, Frolic went lame yesterday."

"You can always take my horse," Mrs. Phillips persisted, her eyebrows contracting as they had over the money question.

A look of what some day might become contempt shadowed the girl's face. She bowed to the architect in a way that

made him understand it was no recommendation to her favor that he was her mother's friend, and walked across the room with a dignity beyond the older woman's power.

"She is at the difficult age," the mother murmured.

"She is growing beautiful!" Hart exclaimed.

"I hope so," Mrs. Phillips answered composedly. "When can you let me see the sketches? Won't you dine with us next Wednesday?"

She seemed to have arranged every detail with accuracy and care.

VII.

The Spellmans lived on the other side of the city from Mrs. Phillips, on Maple Street, very near the lake. Their little stone-front, Gothic-faced house was pretty nearly all the tangible property that Mr. Spellman had to leave to his widow and child when he died, sixteen years before. There had been also his interest in Jackson's Bridge Works, an interest which at the time was largely speculative, but which had enabled Powers Jackson to pay the widow a liberal income without hurting her pride.

The house had remained very much what it had been during Mr. Spellman's lifetime, its bright Brussels carpets and black-walnut furniture having taken on the respectability of age and use. Here, in this homely eddy of the great city, mother and daughter were seated reading after their early dinner, as was their custom. Helen, having shown no aptitude for society, after one or two seasons of playing the wall-flower at the modest parties of their acquaintance, had resolutely sought her own interests in life. One of these was a very earnest attempt to get that vague thing called an education. Just at present, this consisted of much reading of a sociological character.

Mrs. Spellman, who had been turning the leaves of a magazine, finally looked up from its pages and asked, "Have you seen Jackson since the funeral?"

Helen dropped her book into her lap and looked at her mother with startled eyes.

"No, mother. I suppose he is very busy."

She spoke as if she had already asked herself this question and answered it without satisfaction.

"I wonder what he means to do about the will," Mrs. Spellman continued. "It must have been a disappointment to him. I wonder if he had any idea how it would be?"

"What makes you think he would be disappointed?" the girl asked literally.

"Why, I saw Everett this morning, and he told me he thought his cousin might dispute the will. He said Jackson was feeling sore. It would be such a pity if there were any trouble about the will!"

Helen shut the book in her lap and laid it on the table very firmly.

"How can Everett say such things! You know Jackson would never think of anything so — mean, so ungrateful!"

"Some people might think he was justified. And it is a very large sum of money. If he expected" —

"Just because uncle Powers was always so good to him!" the girl interrupted hotly. "Was that any reason why he should give him a lot of money?"

"My dear, most people would think it was a sufficient reason for giving him more than he did."

"Then most people are very self-interested! Everett Wheeler might expect it. But Jackson has something else in life to do than worry over not getting his uncle's money."

Mrs. Spellman, who had known Jackson since he was a child, smiled wisely, but made no reply.

"What should he want more than he has, — the chance to do splendid things,

to work for something better than money? That's the worst about Chicago, — you hear nothing but money, money, from morning to night. No one believes any man cares for any other thing. Everett does n't!"

"Poor Everett!" her mother said with quiet irony. "He is n't thinking of contesting the will, however."

"Nor is Jackson, I know," the girl answered positively.

She rose from her chair by the lamp, and walked to and fro in the room. When she stood she was a tall woman, almost large, showing the growth that the New England stock can assume in a favorable environment. While she read, her features had been quite dull. They were fired now with feeling, and the deep eyes burned.

Suddenly Mrs. Spellman remarked, "Why should n't we go away, to Europe? Would n't you like to spend a year abroad?"

"Why?" the girl demanded quickly, pausing opposite her mother. "What makes you say that?"

"There is n't much to keep us here," Mrs. Spellman explained.

The girl turned away her face, as she answered evasively, "Why should we go away? I don't want to leave."

She knew that her mother was thinking of what had occurred to her many times as these last days had gone by without their seeing the young architect. Possibly, now that he knew himself to be without fortune, he wished to show her that there could be no question of marriage between them. She rejected the idea haughtily. And even if it were so, she would not admit to herself the wound. It would be no pleasure for her to go away.

Could it be true that he was thinking of fighting the will? Her heart scorned the suggestion. She returned to her chair, resolutely picked up her book, and turned the pages with a methodical, unseeing regularity. As the clock tinkled

off nine strokes, Mrs. Spellman rose, kissed her daughter, silently pressing her fingers on the light folds of her hair, and went upstairs to her room. Another half hour went by; then, as the clock struck the hour, the doorbell rang. Helen, recollecting that the servants had probably left the kitchen, put down her book and stepped into the hall. She waited a moment there, but when the bell rang a second time she went resolutely to the door and opened it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "Jackson! I thought it might be a tramp."

"You are n't so far wrong," the architect answered with a laugh. "Is it too late to come in?"

For answer she held the door wide open.

"I have been dining with Mrs. Phillips; she has asked me to draw some plans for her," Hart explained. "I thought I would tell you and your mother about it."

"Mother has gone upstairs, but come in. You know I read late. And I am so glad to hear about the plans."

The strong night wind brushed boisterously through the open door, ruffling the girl's loosely coiled hair. She put her hands to her head to tighten the hairpins here and there. If the man could have read colors in the dark hall, he would have seen that the girl's face, usually too pale, had flushed. His ears were quick enough to detect the tremulous note in her voice, the touch of surprise and sudden feeling. It answered something electric in himself, something that had driven him across the city straightway from Mrs. Phillips's house.

He followed her into the circle of lamplight, and sat down heavily in the chair that she had been occupying.

"What's this thing you are reading?" he asked in his usual tone of authority, picking up the bulky volume beneath the lamp. "Hobson's Social Problem. Where did you get hold of that? It's a queer thing for a girl. is n't it?"

His tolerantly amused tone indicated the value he put on women's education.

"Professor Sturges recommended it."

"Um," he commented, turning over the leaves critically.

"But tell me about Mrs. Phillips and the plans."

There was an awkward constraint between them, not that the hour or the circumstance of their being alone made them self-conscious. There was nothing unusual in his coming late like this. But many things had happened since they had been together alone: the old man's death, the funeral, the will, — most of all the will!

He told her of the new house in Forest Park. It had been decided upon that evening, his plans having been received enthusiastically. But he lacked all interest in it. He was thinking how the week had changed everything between them. Because of that he had not been to see her before, and he felt guilty in being here now.

"Mother and I have just been talking of you. We have n't seen you since the funeral," Helen said, speaking what was in her mind.

Her words carried no reproach. Yet at once he felt that he was put on the defensive; he did not care to explain why he had avoided the Maple Street house.

"A lot has happened," he replied vaguely. "Things have changed pretty completely for me!"

A tone of bitterness crept into his voice in spite of himself. He wanted sympathy; for that, in part, he had come to her. At the same time he felt that it was a weak thing to do, that he should have gone almost anywhere but to her.

"It takes a man a few days to catch his breath," he continued, "when he finds he's been cut off with a shilling, as they say in the play."

Her eyes dropped from his face, and her hands began to move restlessly over the folds of her skirt.

"I've had a lot to think about — to look at the future in a new way. There's no hope now of leaving this place, thanks to uncle!"

"Oh!" she exclaimed in a low voice. The coldness of her tone was not lost upon the man. He saw suddenly that it would not do to admit to her that he contemplated contesting his uncle's will.

"Of course," he hastened to add magnanimously, "uncle had a perfect right to do as he liked. It was his money. But what could he have had against me?"

"Why, nothing, I am sure!" she answered quickly.

"It looks as if he had!"

"Perhaps he thought it was better so, — better for you," she suggested gently. "He used to say that the men of his time had more in their lives than men have nowadays, because they had to make all the fight for themselves. Nowadays so many young men inherit capital. He thought there were two great gifts in life, — health and education. When a man had those, he could go out to meet the future bravely."

"Yes, I know all that," he hastened to say. "But the world is n't running on just the same lines it was when uncle Powers was working at the forge. It's a longer road up these days."

"Is it?" the girl asked vaguely. Then they were silent once more.

There was nothing of reproof in her words, yet he felt the strange difference in the atmosphere of this faded little Maple Street house from the world he had been living in. He had told himself for the last ten days that now he could not marry this woman, that a great and perfectly obvious barrier had been raised by his disinheritance. It had all been so clear to him that he had not questioned the idea.

That very evening he had had more talk about the will with the clever Mrs. Phillips, and he had come away from her resolved to contest the instrument.

On the morrow he intended to notify his cousin and take the preliminary steps. Yet, on the very heels of that decision, there had come an irresistible desire to see this other woman, the longing for the antithesis which so often besets the feeble human will. Nothing was more unlike Mrs. Phillips in his horizon than this direct, inexperienced girl, full of pure enthusiasms.

Now he saw very clearly that nothing would remove him farther from Helen than the act he was contemplating. If she but knew his intention, she would scorn him forever! He had lost her somehow, either way, he kept saying to himself, as he sat there trying to think calmly. He put another black mark against his uncle's memory!

He had never cared to be near her so much as now. Every soreness and weakness of his spirit seemed to call out for her strong, capable hand. Even the sensuous Mrs. Phillips, by some subtle crossing of the psychological wires, had driven him to this plain girl, with the honest eyes and unimpassioned bosom. So also had the contractor and the men at his club. In fact, his world had conspired to set him down here, before the one who alone knew nothing of its logic!

"You have n't said anything about the school," Helen remarked after a time. "Are n't you glad!" she exclaimed, in the need of her spirit to know him to be as generous as she thought him. "It was so big, so large-hearted of him! Especially after all the bitter things the papers had said about him, — to give everything he had made, the whole work of his life, to help the people and the very ones who had so often misunderstood him and tried to hurt him. He was great enough to forget the strikes and the riots, and their shooting at him! He forgave them. He saw why they erred, and he wanted to lift them out of their hate and their ignorance. He wanted to make their lives happier and better! Were n't

you glad? Was n't it a splendid answer to his enemies?"

The warmth of her feeling lent her quiet face glow and beauty. She spoke fast, but in a distinct, low voice. It had a note of appeal in it, coming from her desire to rouse the man. For the moment she succeeded. He was ashamed to be unworthy in her eyes.

"Why, yes," he admitted; "as you put it, it seems fine. But I don't feel sure that I admire an old man's philanthropies, though. He does n't want the money any longer, — that's a sure thing! So he chucks it into one big scheme or another that's likely to bring him a lot of fame. Uncle Powers was sharp enough in gathering his dollars, and in keeping 'em too" —

"Oh! How can you say that! Don't," the girl implored, looking at him with troubled eyes.

If she had had much experience of men and things, she would have understood the architect's attitude long before this. But added to her inexperience was her persistent need of soul to see those she loved large and generous.

"Well," Hart resumed, less confidently, "I did n't mean any disrespect to the old man. It's only the oldest law of life that he lived up to. And I guess he meant to have me learn that law as fast as I can. You've got to fight for what you want in this world, and fight hard, and fight all the time. And there is n't much room for sentiment and fine ideas and philanthropy until you are old, and have earned your pile, and done your neighbor out of his in the process."

She was silent, and he continued, willing to let her see some of the harder, baser reaches of his mind: —

"It's just the same way with art. It's only good when it succeeds. It does n't live unless it can succeed. I see that now! Chicago has taught me that in two years. I'm going to open my own shop pretty soon and look for trade. That's what uncle wanted. If I get

some big commissions, and put up a lot of skyscrapers or mills, why, I shall have won out. What does any one care for the kind of work you do? It's the price it brings every time!"

"Don't say that! Please, please don't talk that way, so bitterly."

There was real pain in her voice, and her eyes were filmed with incipient tears. He leaned forward in his low chair and asked impetuously, "Why do you say that? Why do you care what I say?"

Her lips trembled; she looked at him piteously for a moment, as if to beg him not to force her to confess more openly how he had hurt her, how much she could be hurt by seeing in him the least touch of baseness. She rose, without knowing what she did, with an unconscious instinct of flight. She twisted her hands nervously, facing him, as he rose, too, with her misty, honest eyes.

"Tell me!" he whispered. "Do you care?"

"Don't," she moaned inarticulately, seeking in her whirling brain for some defense against the man.

They hung there, like this, for the space of several seconds, their hearts beating furiously, caught in a sudden wave of emotion, which drew them inexorably closer, against their reason and their will; which mastered their natures without regard for their feeble human purpose. . . .

He drew her to him and kissed her. She murmured in the same weak, defenseless tone as before. — "Don't, not yet."

But she gave herself quite unreservedly to his strong arms. She gave herself with all the perfect self-forgetfulness of an absolutely pure woman who loves and is glad. The little thoughts of self were forgotten, the preconceptions of her training. She was glad to give, to give all in the joy of giving to him!

The man, having thus done what his reason had counseled him for the past

week not to do, what he would have said an hour before was impossible for him to do, came out of the great whelming wave of feeling, and found himself alone upon the dark city street under the tranquil canopy of the city smoke. His whole being was at rest with the purification of strong passion, at rest and at peace, with that wonderful sense of poise, of rightness about one's self, which comes when passion is perfect and touches the whole soul. The fret about his affairs and his uncle's will, in which he had lived for the past week, had vanished with the touch of her lips.

He had committed himself to a very difficult future by engaging himself to a poor woman and struggling upwards in real poverty, instead of taking the decencies of a comfortable bachelorhood. But there was something inspiring in what had happened, something strangely electrifying to his nerves. He had stooped and caught the masculine burden of the race, but he felt his feet a-tingle for the road before him. And, best of all, in his heart there was reverence for that unknown woman who had kissed him and taken him to her — for always.

Robert Herrick.

(To be continued.)

CANDLEMAS.

THE hedge-rows cast a shallow shade
 Upon the frozen grass,
 But skies at evensong are soft,
 And comes the Candlemas.

Each day a little later now
 Lingers the westering sun;
 Far out of sight the miracles
 Of April are begun.

O barren bough! O frozen field!
 Hopeless ye wait no more.
 Life keeps her dearest promises —
 The Spring is at the door!

Arthur Ketchum.