

UPON IMPULSE.

The seminary buildings stood just across the meadow from the low lodge-like railway station, and a path led through a gap in the fence across the meadow. People were soberly converging toward its central building, as if proceeding to church.

Among the people who alighted from the two o'clock train were Professor Blakesly and his wife and a tall, dark man whom they called Ware.

Mrs. Blakesly was plump and pretty, plainly the mother of two or three children and the sovereign of a modest suburban cottage. Blakesly was as evidently a teacher; even the casual glances of the other visitors might discover the character of these people.

Ware was not so easy to be read. His face was lean and brown, and his squarely clipped mustache gave him a stern look. His body was well rounded with muscle, and he walked alertly; his manner was direct and vigorous, manifestly of the open air.

As they entered the meadow he paused and said with humorous irresolution, "I don't know what I am out here for."

"To see the pretty girls, of course," said Mrs. Blakesly.

"They may be plain, after all," he said.

"They're always pretty at graduation time and at marriage," Blakesly interpreted.

"Then there's the ice-cream and cake," Mrs. Blakesly added.

"Where do all these people come from?" Ware asked, looking about. "It's all country here."

"They are the fathers, mothers, and brothers of the seminary girls. They come from everywhere. See the dear creatures about the door! Let's hurry along."

"They do not interest me. I take off my hat to the beauty of the day, however."

Ware had evidently come under protest, for he lingered in the daisied grass which was dappled with shadows and tinkling with bobolinks and cat-birds.

A broad path led up to the central building, whose double doors were swung wide with most hospitable intent.

Ware ascended the steps behind his friends, a bored look on his dark face.

Two rows of flushed, excited girls with two teachers at their head stood flanking the doorway to receive the visitors, who streamed steadily into the wide, cool hall.

Mrs. Blakesly took Ware in hand. "Mr. Ware, this is Miss Powell. Miss Powell, this is Mr. Jenkin Ware, lawyer and friend to the Blakeslys."

"I'm very glad to see you," said a cool voice, in which gladness was entirely absent.

Ware turned to shake hands mechanically, but something in the steady eyes and clasp of the hand held out turned his listless manner into surprise and confusion. He stared at her without speaking, only for a second, and yet so long she coloured and withdrew her hand sharply.

"I beg your pardon, I didn't get the name."

"Miss Powell," answered Mrs. Blakesly, who had certainly missed this little comedy, which would have been so delicious to her.

Ware moved on, shaking hands with the other teachers and bowing to the girls. He seized an early moment to turn and look back at Miss Powell. His listless indifference was gone. She was a fine figure of a woman—a strong, lithe figure, dressed in a well-ordered, light-coloured gown. Her head was girlish, with a fluff of brown hair knotted low at the back. Her profile was magnificent. The head had the intellectual poise, but the proud bosom and strong body added another quality. "She is a modern type," Ware said, remembering a painting of such a type he had seen in a recent exhibition.

As he studied her she turned and caught him looking, and he felt again a curious fluttering rush at his heart. He fancied she flushed a little deeper as she turned away.

As for him, it had been a very long while since he had felt that singular weakness in the presence of a young woman. He walked on trying to account for it. It made him feel very boyish. He had a furtive desire to remain in the hall where he could watch

her, and when he passed up the stairs, it was with a distinct feeling of melancholy, as if he were leaving something very dear and leaving it forever.

He wondered where this feeling came from, and he looked into the upturned faces of the girls as if they were pansies. He wandered about the rooms with the Blakeslys, being bored by introductions, until at last Miss Powell came up the stairway with the last of the guests.

While the girls sang and went through some pretty drills Ware again studied Miss Powell. Her appeal to his imagination was startling. He searched for the cause of it. It could not be in her beauty. Certainly she was fine and womanly and of splendid physique, but all about her were lovely girls of daintier flesh and warmer colour. He reasoned that her power was in her eyes, steady, frank as sunlight, clear as water in a mountain brook. She seemed unconscious of his scrutiny.

At last they began moving down the stairs and on to the other buildings. Ware and Blakesly waited for the ladies to come down. And when they came they were in the midst of a flood of others, and Ware had no chance to speak to them. As they moved across the grass he fell in behind Mrs. Blakesly, who seemed to be telling secrets to Miss Powell, who flushed and shook her head.

Mrs. Blakesly turned and saw Ware close behind her, and said, "O Mr. Ware, where is my dear, dear husband?"

"Back in the swirl," Ware replied.

Mrs. Blakesly artfully dropped Miss Powell's arm and fell back. "I must not desert the poor dear." As she passed Ware she said, "Take my place."

"With pleasure," he replied, and walked on after Miss Powell, who seemed not to care to wait.

How simply she was dressed! She moved like an athlete, without effort and without constraint. As he walked quickly to overtake her a finer light fell over the hills and a fresher green came into the grass. The daisies nodding in the wind blurred together in a dance of light and loveliness which moved him like a song.

"How beautiful everything is to-day!" he said, as he stepped to her side. He felt as if he had said, how beautiful you are!

She flashed a quick, inquiring glance at him.

"Yes; June can be beautiful with us. Still there is a beauty more mature, when the sickle is about to be thrust in."

He did not hear what she said. He was thinking of the power that lay in the oval of her face, in the fluffy tangle of her hair. *Ah! now he knew.* With that upward glance she brought back his boy love, his teacher whom he had worshipped as boys sometimes will, with a love as pure as winter starlight. Yes, now it was clear. There was the same flex of the splendid waist, the same slow lift of the head and steady, beautiful eyes.

As she talked he was a youth of seventeen, he was lying at his teacher's feet by the river while she read wonderful love-stories. There were others there, but they did not count. And then the tears blurred his eyes, he remembered walking behind her dead body as it was borne to the hill-side burying-ground, and all the world was desolate for him.

He became aware that Miss Powell was looking at him with startled eyes. He hastened to apologise and explain. "Pardon me; you look so much like a schoolboy idol—I—I seem to see her again. I didn't hear what you said, you brought the past back so poignantly."

There was something in his voice which touched her, but before he could go on they were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Blakesly and one of the other teachers. There was a dancing light in Mrs. Blakesly's eyes as she looked at Ware. She had just been saying to her husband, "What a splendid figure Miss Powell is! How well they look together! wouldn't it be splendid if—"

"O my dear, you're too bad. Please don't match-make any more to-day. Let nature attend to these things," Mr. Blakesly replied with manifest impatience; "nature attended to our case."

"I have no faith in nature any more. I want to have at least a finger in the pie myself. Nature don't work in all cases. I'm afraid nature can't in his case."

"Careful; he'll hear you, my dear."

"Where do we go now, Miss Powell?" asked Blakesly as they came to a halt on the opposite side of the campus.

"I think they are all going to the gymnasium building. Won't you come? That is my dominion."

They answered by moving off, Mrs. Blakesly taking Miss Powell's arm. As they streamed away in files she said, "Isn't he good-looking? We've known him for years. He's all right," she said significantly, and squeezed Miss Powell's arm.

"Well, Lou Blakesly, you're the same old irrepressible!"

"Blushing already, you *dear*! I tell you he's splendid. I wish he'd take to you," and she gave Miss Powell another squeeze. "It would be *such* a match. Brains and beauty, too."

"Oh, hush!"

They entered the cool, wide hall of the gymnasium, with its red brick walls, its polished floor, and the yellow-red wooden beams showing picturesquely.

There were only a few people remaining in the hall, most having passed on into the museum. As they came to the various appliances Miss Powell explained them.

"What are these rings for?" inquired Mrs. Blakesly, pointing at the row of iron rings depending from long ropes.

"They are for swinging on," and she leaped lightly upward and caught and swung by one hand.

"Mercy! Do you do that?"

"She seems to be doing it now," Blakesly said.

"I am one of the teachers," Miss Powell replied, dropping to the floor.

It was glorious to see how easily she seized a heavy dumb-bell and swung it above her head. The front line of her body was majestic as she stood thus.

"Gracious! I couldn't do that," exclaimed Mrs. Blakesly.

"No, not with your style of dress," replied her husband. "I have to pin her hat on this year," he said to Ware.

"I love it," said Miss Powell, as she drew a heavy weight from the floor and stood with the cord across her shoulder. "It adds so much to life. It gives what Browning calls the wild joy of living. Do you know, few women know what that means? It's been denied us. Only the men have known

*"The wild joys of living! the leaping from
rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the
fir-tree, the cool silver shock
Of a plunge in the pool's living water."*

I try to teach my girls 'How good is man's life, the mere living!'"

The men cheered as she paused for a moment flushed and breathless.

She went on: "We women have been shut out from the sports too long—I mean sports in the sun. The men have had the best of it. All the swimming, all the boating, wheeling, all the grand, wild life; now we're going to have a part."

The young ladies clustered about with flushed, excited faces while their teacher planted her flag and claimed new territory for women.

Miss Powell herself grew conscious, and flushed and paused abruptly.

Mrs. Blakesly effervesced in admiring astonishment. "Well, well! I didn't know you could make a speech."

"I didn't mean to do so," she replied.

"Go on! Go on!" everybody called out, but she turned away to show some other apparatus.

"Wasn't she fine?" exclaimed Mrs. Blakesly to Ware.

"Beyond praise," he replied. She went at once to communicate her morsel of news to her husband, and at length to Miss Powell.

The company passed out into other rooms until no one was left but Mrs. Blakesly, the professor, and Ware. Miss Powell was talking again, and to Ware mainly. Ware was thoughtful, Miss Powell radiant.

"I didn't know what life was till I could do that." She took up a large dumb-bell, and extending it at arm's length, whirled it back and forth. Her forearm, white and smooth, swelled into strong action, and her supple hands had the unwavering power and pressure of an athlete, and withal Ware thought, She is feminine. Her physical power has not coarsened her; it has enlarged her life, but left her entirely womanly.

In some adroit way Mrs. Blakesly got her husband out of the room and left Ware and Miss Powell together. She was showing him the view from the windows, and they seemed to be perfectly absorbed. She looked around once and saw that Mrs. Blakesly was showing her husband something in the farther end of the room. After that she did not think of them.

The sun went lower in the sky and flamed along the sward. He spoke of the mystical power of the waving daisies and the glowing greens which no painter

ever seems to paint. While they looked from the windows their arms touched, and they both tried to ignore it. She shivered a little as if a cold wind had blown upon her. At last she led the way out and down the stairs to the campus. They heard the gay laughter of the company at their cakes and ices, up at the central building.

He stopped outside the hallway, and as she looked up inquiringly at him, he said quietly, "Suppose we go down the road? It seems pleasanter there."

She acquiesced like one in a pleasure which made duty seem absurd.

Strong and fine as she was, she had never found a lover to whom she yielded her companionship with unalloyed delight. She was thirty years of age, and her girlhood was past. She looked at this man, and a suffocating band seemed to encircle her throat. She knew he was strong and clean. He was a little saddened with life—that she read in his deep-set eyes and unsmiling lips.

The road led toward the river, and as they left the campus they entered a lane shaded by natural oaks. He talked on slowly. He asked her what her plans were.

"To teach and to live," she said. Her enthusiasm for the work seemed entirely gone.

Once he said, "This is the finest hour of my life."

On the bank of the river they paused and seated themselves on the sward under a tree whose roots fingered the stream with knuckled hands.

"Yes, every time you look up at me you bring back my boyish idol," he went on. "She was older than I. It is as if I had grown older and she had not, and that she were you, or you were she. I can't tell you how it has affected me. Every movement you make goes deep down into my sweetest, tenderest recollections. It's always June there, always sweet and clean. Her death and burial was mystical in its beauty. I looked in her coffin, she was the grand-est statue that ever lay in marble; the Greek types are insipid beside that vision. You'll say I idealised her; possibly I did, but there she is. O God! It was terrible to see one die so young and so lovely."

There was a silence. Tears came to her eyes. He could only exclaim; weep-

ing was denied him. His voice trembled, but grew firmer as he went on:

"And now you come. I don't know exactly in what way you resemble her. I only know you shake me as no other human being has done since that coffin-lid shut out her face." He lifted his head and looked around. "But nature is beautiful and full of light and buoyancy. I am not going to make you sad. I want to make you happy. I was only a boy to her. She cared for me only as a mature woman likes an apt pupil, but she made all nature radiant for me, as you do now."

He smiled upon her suddenly. His sombre mood passed like one of the shadows of the clouds floating over the campus. It was only a recollected mood. As he looked at her the old hunger came into his heart, but the buoyancy and emotional exaltation of youth came back also.

"Miss Powell, are you free to marry me?" he said suddenly.

She grew very still, but she flushed and then she turned her face away from him. She had no immediate reply.

"That is an extraordinary thing to ask you, I know," he went on; "but it seems as if I had known you a long time, and then sitting here in the midst of nature with the insects singing all about us—well, conventions are not so vital as in drawing-rooms. Remember your Browning."

She who had declaimed Browning so blithely now sat silent, but the colour went out of her face, and she listened to the multitudinous stir and chirp of living things, and her eyes dreamed as he went on steadily, his eyes studying her face.

"Browning believes in these impulses. I'll admit I never have. I've always reasoned upon things, at least since I became a man. It hasn't brought me much, and I'm much disposed to try the virtue of an impulse. I feel as certain that we can be happy together as I am of life, so I come back to my question, Are you free to marry me?"

She flushed again. "I have no other ties, if that is what you mean."

"That is what I mean precisely. I felt that you were free like myself. I might ask Blakesly to vouch for me, but I prefer not. I ask for no one's opinion of you. Can't you trust to

that insight of which women are supposed to be happily possessed?"

She smiled a little. "I never boasted of any divining power."

He came nearer. "Come, you and I have gone by rule and reason long enough. Here we have a magnificent impulse; let us follow. Don't ask me to wait, that would spoil it all; considerations would come in."

"Ought they not to come in?"

"No," he replied, and his low voice had the intensity of a trumpet. "If this magnificent moment passes by, this chance for a pure impulsive choice, it is lost forever. You know Browning makes much of such lost opportunities. Seeing you there with bent head and blowing hair, I would throw the world away to become the blade of grass you break. There, will that do?" He smiled.

"That speech should bring back youth to us both," she said.

"Right action *now* will," he quickly answered.

"But I must consider."

"Do not. Take the impulse."

"It may be wayward."

"We've both got beyond the wayward impulse. This impulse rises from the profound deeps. Come, the sun sinks, the insect voices thicken, a star passes behind the moon, and life hastens.

Come into my life. Can't you trust me?"

She grew very white, but a look of exaltation came into her face. She lifted her clear, steady eyes to his. She reached her hand to his, "I will," she said, and they rose and stood together thus.

He uncovered his head. A sort of awe fell upon him. A splendid human life was put into his keeping.

"A pure choice," he said exultingly—"a choice untouched by considerations. It brings back the youth of the world."

The sun lay along the sward in level lines, the sky was full of clouds sailing in file, like mighty purple cranes in saffron seas of flame, the wind wavered among the leaves, and the insects sang.

The two looked into each other's faces. They seemed to be transfigured, each to the other.

"You must not go back," he said. "They would not understand you nor me. We will never be so near a great happiness, a great holiday. It is holiday time. Let us go to the mountains."

She drew a sigh as if all her cares and duties dropped from her, then she smiled and a comprehending light sparkled in her eyes.

"Very well, to the clouds if you will."

Hamlin Garland.

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI.

Why wilt thou chide,
Who hast attained to be denied?
Oh, learn, above
All price is my refusal, Love.
My sacred Nay
Was never cheapened by the way.
My single sorrow crowns Thee, Lord
Of an unpurchasable word.

Oh, strong, oh, pure!
As yea makes happier loves secure;
I vow thee this:
Unique rejection of a kiss.
I guard for thee
This jealous sad monopoly.
I seal this honour thine; none dare
Hope for a part in thy despair.

Alice Meynell.