

moved up the canal in the still, summer sun. Neither of them spoke. With the feel of a puddle in his wrists, the sun on his back, the outdoors all around him, the man was too full of the renewed joy of physical existence. With every dig of his blade into the water, with every answering life and spurt of the boat, he felt as if new blood were pumping through him. The girl lay back on the cushions, half in exhaustion, half in delicious languor, an abandonment to repose, and watched the green banks slip by through half-closed lids.

"Low bridge!" cried Hollister presently. As they ducked and shot under the roof shadow where the misty sunbeams filtered through the cracks above, their eyes met. He smiled at her reassuringly, and, leaning forward, touched her hand. "We're getting farther and farther away from it," he said.

The canal ran placidly on for a mile or two, winding above Mr. Carnegie's foolish lake. The day was windless, the water still as a mirror. Birds sang in the trees on the banks; through the trees on the distant hills the towers of Princeton began to emerge. Once or twice they lay up against the embankment while a slow canal boat was towed past. Each time, when the wash of the boat had gone down, they moved on again, but ever more slowly, for the lazy peace of the canal was working upon them.

"Canals have always had a strange fascination for me," said Hollister, once. "When I was a very little chap the town from our town to the city ran along beside one, and I used to wonder where all the barges came from and where they went, just as George Moore says he used to do. There is a mystery about a canal—about this canal for instance. Where does it begin, where does it end? Who dug it in the long ago? It seems ages old, a part of nature, of the landscape. And like all canals, though it leads from somewhere to somewhere else, yet the water does not flow. It is still and quiet, like a secret."

"It's the most utterly peaceful thing I have ever known; it is a rest cure," said the girl, and shut her eyes. By and by they passed the end of Mr. Carnegie's foolish lake and drew near a little town. The noon hush was on the world. Their boat glided along the depths of the sky, so still the water was. All sounds had ceased, save the barking of a distant dog and the happy cry of a child. Before them a white buck barred their way. To the left, the lock-keeper's cottage, bright with new whitewash and gay with a red geranium in a pot beside the door, looked down at its reflection in the black water and was satisfied. To the right, beyond the little bridge and the great willow tree, was an absurd toy of a railroad station beside a single-track road that had wandered aimlessly into the landscape. Then a highway went up the hill, lined with small houses, and on the summit of the hill rose a white steeple. Just at that moment there was not a soul in sight, and from the steeple, thin and faint, drifted down the sound of a bell, tolling twelve.

"Lunch!" said Hollister, shooting the canal in under the shade of the willow. "I believe I am hungry," said the girl, with something like gaiety in her tone.

Up in the tiny village they found a store where peanut butter and crackers were sold, and even a bunch of hot cats hung in the window, amidst whips, harnesses, stumps of calves, and a sleepy swarm of flies. With their provisions they returned to the canoe. Presently Hollister tossed carelessly the empty cracker box, weighted with a stone, because, he said, it would be a crime to violate the fitness of this picture-book water way; and looked an interrogation at the girl.

"She smiled back at him. "You saw the box go down?" she said. "Well, my last doubt went down with it. I've decided. You needn't worry about me any more, kind gentleman."

"Was the ideal is saved?" he cried. "Good!"

"It is curious," she mused, "how much plainer some things are only fifty miles from town. I can't put it into words; but I didn't really make the choice myself at all. It was made for me while we were floating up here in this still little boat, with you sitting in the stern, so—so different like the boys we saw back there in the college grounds. It's as if a different order of life from mine had just come and grabbed hold of me, kind but strong, and made me do its way."

"No," said the man, "that's not it. You had the different order deep in you somewhere, and this life to-day has just called to it—that's all."

"Yes, I suppose I have," she said, huff to herself. "I wonder if really that isn't the part of me through which the big things will come—oh, I am sure it is!"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

The girl grew red. Then suddenly she put her blushes aside, and said calmly: "You have been my very good friend. I'll tell you everything. I was born in a little city on the one-night circuit, and had to quit school when I was fifteen to work in a store. I was always ambitious, and always crazy about the stage. But my folks weren't only poor, they didn't know about things to send me to be trained, even if they could have afforded it. Life in the store was worse than drudgery—it was hell. I acted at socials and dramatic clubs whenever I could, and one day when I was eighteen I went to the manager of a musical comedy that came to town and asked him for a job. He said he needed broilers, and he took me. Most of the fresh girls—I mean literally—in musical shows are picked up like I. I told my parents, and they said I couldn't go. So I ran away. For the rest of that season we did one night, and I learned what theatrical life is. All my dreams of ease and luxury vanished, and the things I saw going on in the company sickened me. But a girl who's worked in a department store, even a small one, knows how to take care of herself if she wants to, and I wasn't molested much."

"But I didn't want the musical line; I wanted to act. When we got in the following June I began the horrid, humiliating trot around from one office to another, waiting, begging, suffering all kinds of insults. Finally a man who wanted somebody for a tiny soubrette role in a cheap stock company took me,



She put her hand in his and then vanished.

and shipped me up to a New England city. There I lived on next to nothing a week, played every afternoon and evening, and rehearsed every morning. But I got a chance to act, and, as I made good, they gave me pretty good parts finally. I learned a lot, too, from our leading woman, who was kind and helpful. She'd be on the three-acts along Broadway if it wasn't for the booze, poor thing.

"Then I came back to the Alley, and did the round of the offices again, and was again insulted—insulted, you know, in the worst way a woman can be. I began to wonder if that was the price all of them paid for their parts. And then I began to wonder another thing. I suppose other girls have wondered it before me, God help them! I began to wonder, not so much if it was wrong, but if right or wrong, it wasn't the way to learn a thousand shades of the emotions we actresses are called on to express, and which I, for one, felt myself so ignorant of expressing. I was ambitious, terribly ambitious; you believe that, don't you?"

"Of course," said Hollister gravely.

"Well, it wasn't the promise of better parts for the mere sake of the name, or greater comfort; it was just this ambition to learn, to get ahead, this ideal of one's art, that began to whisper to me. Just about then I saw a play where the doctrine was preached, or seemed to be preached. And always there are the examples of certain great actresses idols to us lesser people. I got all confused and hopeless about it. It was wrong; it was right. It was my duty to myself to resist; it was my duty to myself to yield. I've been worrying along in a

tiny, no-good part this winter, on the road. We came in the other day—we're filling in a week down at the Grand now. Last night the manager offered me the second lead next season at—at his price. That's what I was debating when I met you."

The girl looked Hollister in the eyes for a moment as she finished, desperately trying to read there if he understood and believed. She saw his kind, strong sympathy. Then she suddenly broke into sobs, and buried her burning face in her hands.

He was silent for a time. It seemed best. Then he spoke.

"I've noticed," he said quietly, "that most of the plays and books which preach the doctrine you speak of preach it as a justification of wrong already committed, as a sort of consolation, not as advice to those who haven't stepped out of the path. That's what makes them, when you come to reflect on the matter, so pitifully weak as philosophy or ethics. It isn't sin, it's sympathy that gives you power to act emotions, or me power to write them—for I, too, am trying to be an artist, and I haven't got as far as a speaking part yet, either! You spoke of to-day's way of life, this country way, this high-bred, college way—well, don't you see that this way has, after all, produced more and greater artists than the other way ever did? And don't you see that it gives you something the other can never give? I mean peace and security and the knowledge that you are not a coward, that you have never gone back on an ideal? Sympathy and imagination can teach you to portray any emotion. And they grow best, believe me, in the life you're chosen. You'll get the second lead soon enough; cheer up! The world—even the stage world—isn't so dark as it looks on a hot night in New York."

The girl raised her face to his and put out her hand. "You're right; I know you're right. Every bit of me is telling me so now," she said. "To-morrow I'll begin snoooping for a part in a different company."

"You must let me help you," said Hollister. "I've some friends in the business, even if they don't like my plays. Besides, I'm on a newspaper, and that helps a whole lot."

"Some day, who knows?" she laughed. "I'll star in one of your dramas!"

"Shake on it!" he cried. And then he faced the canoe toward Princeton, and, chatting gaily, like two new born into a world of joy and sunshine, they slid between green banks up the canal.

The evening lights on lower Manhattan were twinkling, as of a myriad cliff dwellings, against the twilight blue as the ferryboat bearing them back moved out of her slip. A cool, salt breeze came up the bay and touched like a caress their eyelids, heavy with healthy sleep, the sleep that comes from open air and exercise. The great, twinkling city, the tossing river, the evening sky, the gulls, the busy ferryboats dashing to and fro like golden waterbugs, seemed beautiful to them, like a picture. After a hastily snatched supper Hollister left his companion at the stage entrance.

"Nerves?" he said. "Why, I shall sleep like a log for ten mortal hours and wake up to work on our play!"

But the girl looked at him almost shyly.

"I've a long way yet to go!" she said in a low tone.

"Nonsense," said he. "The good part will come before you know it." "That isn't what I mean," she answered.

"But you've no doubts any more?"

"That isn't what I mean, either." She smiled a little wistfully as she met his eyes.

"Then what?"

She shook her head. "But it's worth it!" she said, as she put her hand in his again, and then vanished quickly into the dingy passage.

Hollister did sleep that night, the sleep of oblivion, even of oblivion to an irate editor. But before he went to bed he read the story he had last been working on.

"Rubbish!" he exclaimed as he finished. "Who invented the fallacy that the happy ending is illogical? Here's not an ideal but a delusion gone!"

And he tore the last sheets of his manuscript into fragments. It was not till later that he came to realize what her parting words had meant—which proves that he was a modest man.

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