

have a presentiment that you are going to propose, Ned. I do wish you wouldn't; for things are so much nicer as they are."

I drew my chair a little nearer. "Now, how did you know that I was going to propose?" I asked in genuine wonder.

"Don't women always know? Do you suppose any woman in the world was ever taken unawares? But—oh, Ned, our friendship has been so good and so pleasant! What a pity to spoil it! Don't you feel how splendid it is that a young man and a young woman should be able to talk face to face as we have talked?"

"I don't know, Gladys. You see, I can talk face to face with—the station master." I can't imagine how that official came into the matter; but in he trotted, and set us both laughing. "That does not satisfy me in the least. I want my arms round you, and your head on my breast, and—oh, Gladys, I want—"

She had sprung from her chair, as she saw signs that I proposed to demonstrate some of my wants. "You've spoiled everything, Ned," she said. "It's all so beautiful and natural until this kind of thing comes in! It is such a pity! Why can't you control yourself?"

"I didn't invent it," I pleaded. "It's love."

"Well, perhaps if both love, it may be different. I have never felt it."

"But you must—you, with your beauty, with your soul! Oh, Gladys, you were made for love! You must love!"

"One must wait till it comes."

"But why can't you love me, Gladys? Is it my appearance, or what?"

She did unbend a little. She put forward a hand—such a gracious, stooping attitude it was—and she pressed back my head. Then she looked into my upturned face with a very wistful smile.

"No, it isn't that," she said at last. "You're not a conceited boy by nature, and so I can safely tell you it is not that. It's deeper."

"My character?"

She nodded severely.

"What can I do to mend it? Do sit down and talk it over. No, really, I won't if you'll only sit down!"

She looked at me with a wondering distrust which was much more to my mind than her wholehearted confidence (How primitive and bestial it looks when you put it down in black and white!—and perhaps after all it is only a feeling peculiar to myself). Anyhow, she sat down.

"Now tell me what's amiss with me?"

"I'm in love with somebody else," said she.

It was my turn to jump out of my chair.

"It's nobody in particular," she explained, laughing at the expression of my face: "only an ideal. I've never met the kind of man I mean."

"Tell me about him. What does he look like?"

"Oh, he might look very much like you."

"How dear of you to say that! Well, what is it that he does that I don't do? Just say the word,—teetotal, vegetarian, aeronaut, theosophist, superman. I'll have a try at it, Gladys, if you will only give me an idea what would please you."

SHE laughed at the elasticity of my character. "Well, in the first place, I don't think my ideal would speak like that," said she. "He would be a harder, sterner man, not so ready to adapt himself to a silly girl's whim. But, above all, he must be a man who could do, who could act, who could look Death in the face and have no fear of him, a man of great deeds and strange experiences. It is never a man that I should love, but always the glories he had won; for they would be reflected upon me. Think of Richard Burton! When I read his wife's life of him I could so understand her love! And Lady Stanley! Did you ever read the wonderful last chapter of that book? These are the sort of men that a woman could worship with all her soul, and yet be the greater, not the less, on account of her love, honored by all the world as the inspirer of noble deeds."

She looked so beautiful in her enthusiasm that I nearly brought down the whole level of the interview. I gripped myself hard, and went on with the argument.

"We can't all be Stanleys and Burtons," said I; "besides, we don't get the chance,—at least, I never had the chance. If I did, I should try to take it."

"But chances are all around you. It is the mark of the kind of man I mean that he makes his own chances. You can't hold him back. I've never met him, and yet I seem to know him so well. There are heroisms all round us waiting to be done. It's for men to do them,

and for women to reserve their love as a reward for such men. Look at that young Frenchman who went up last week in a balloon. It was blowing a gale of wind; but because he was announced to go he insisted on starting. The wind blew him fifteen hundred miles in twenty-four hours, and he fell in the middle of Russia. That was the kind of man I mean. Think of the woman he loved, and how other women must have envied her! That's what I should like to be,—envied for my man."

"I'd have done it to please you."

"But you shouldn't do it merely to please me. You should do it because you can't help yourself, because it's natural to you, because the man in you is crying out for heroic expression. Now, when you described the Wigan coal explosion last month, could you not have gone down and helped those people, in spite of the choke damp?"

"I did."

"You never said so."

"There was nothing worth bucking about."

"I didn't know." She looked at me with more interest. "That was brave of you."

"I had to. If you want to write good copy, you must be where the things are."

"What a prosaic motive! It seems to take all the romance out of it. Fancy George stirring up the Dragon in order to get copy out of him! But, still, whatever your motive, I am glad that you went down that mine." She gave me her hand; but with so much sweetness and dignity that I could only stoop and kiss it. "I dare say I am only a foolish woman with a young girl's fancies. And yet it is so real with me, so entirely part of my very self, that I cannot help acting upon it. If I marry, I do want to marry a famous man!"

"Why should you not?" I cried. "It is women like you who brace men up. You've braced me up. Give me a chance, and see if I will take it! Besides, as you say, men ought to *make* their own chances, and not wait until they are given. Look at Clive—just a clerk, and he conquered India! By George! I'll do something in the world yet!"

She laughed at my sudden Irish effervescence. "Why not?" she said. "You have everything a man could have,—youth, health, strength, education, energy. I was sorry you spoke. And now I am glad—so glad—if it wakens these thoughts in you!"

"And if I do—"

Her dear hand rested like warm velvet upon my lips. "Not another word, Sir! You should have been at the office for evening duty half an hour ago; only I hadn't the heart to remind you. Some day, perhaps, when you have won your place in the world, we shall talk it over again."

AND so it was that I found myself that foggy November evening pursuing the Camberwell tram with my heart glowing within me, and with the eager determination that not another day should elapse before I should find some deed which was worthy of my lady. But who—who in all this wide world could ever have imagined the incredible shape which that deed was to take, or the strange steps by which I was led to the doing of it?

And, after all, this opening chapter will seem to the reader to have nothing to do with my narrative; and yet there would have been no narrative without it, for it is only when a man goes out into the world with the thought that there are heroisms all round him, and with the desire all alive in his heart to follow any which may come within sight of him, that he breaks away as I did from the life that he knows, and ventures forth into the wonderful mystic twilight land where lie the great adventures and the great rewards. Behold me, then, at the office of "The London Courier," on the staff of which I was a most insignificant unit, with the settled determination that very night, if possible, to find the quest which should be worthy of my Gladys! Was it hardness, was it selfishness, that she should ask me to risk my life for her own glorification? Such thoughts may come to middle age; but never to ardent three and twenty in the fever of his first love.

CHAPTER II.

"Try Your Luck with Professor Challenger"

I ALWAYS liked McArdle, the crabbed, old, round backed, red headed news editor, and I rather hoped that he liked me. Of course, Beaumont was the real boss; but he lived in the rarefied atmosphere of some Olympian height from which he could distinguish nothing smaller than an international crisis or a split in the