

VII. The Last of Timothy

So accomplished a person as the reader must have seen at once that I made away with Timothy in order to give his little vests and pinafores and shoes to David, and, therefore, dear sir or madam, rail not overmuch at me for causing our painter pain. Know, too, that though his sympathy ran free I soon discovered many of his inquiries to be prompted by a mere selfish desire to save his boy from the fate of mine. Such are parents.

He asked compassionately if there was anything he could do for me, and, of course, there was something he could do, but were I to propose it I doubted not he would be on his stilts at once, for already I had reason to know him for a haughty, sensitive dog, who ever became high at the first hint of help. So the proposal must come from him. I spoke of the many little things in the house that were now hurtful to me to look upon, and he clutched my hand, deeply moved, though it was another house with its little things he saw. I was ashamed to harass him thus, but he had not a sufficiency of the little things, and besides my impulsiveness had plunged me into a deuce of a mess, so I went on distastefully. Was there no profession in this age of specialism for taking away children's garments from houses where they were suddenly become a pain? Could I sell them? Could I give them to the needy, who would probably dispose of them for gin? I told him of a friend with a young child who had already refused them because it would be unpleasant to him to be reminded of Timothy, and I think this was what touched him to the quick, so that he made the offer I was waiting for.

I had done it with a heavy foot, and by this time was in a rage with both him and myself, but I always was a bungler, and, having adopted this means in a hurry, I could at the time see no other easy way out. Timothy's hold on life, as you may have apprehended, was ever of the slightest, and I suppose I always knew that he must soon revert to the obscure. He could never have penetrated into the open. It was no life for a boy.

Yet now, that his time had come, I was loath to see him go. I seem to remember carrying him that evening to the window with uncommon tenderness (following the setting sun that was to take him away), and telling him with not unnatural bitterness that he had got to leave me because another child was in need of all his pretty things; and as the sun, his true father, lapt him in its dancing arms, he sent his love to a lady of long ago whom he called by the sweetest of names, not knowing in his innocence that the little white birds are the birds that never have a mother. I wished (so had

the phantasy of Timothy taken possession of me) that before he went he could have played once in the Kensington Gardens, and have ridden on the fallen trees, calling gloriously to me to look; that he could have sailed one paper-galleon on the Round Pond; fain would I have had him chase one hoop a little way down the laughing avenues of childhood, where memory tells us we run but once, on a long summer-day, emerging at the other end as men and women with all the fun to pay for; and I think (thus fancy wantons with me in these desolate chambers) he knew my longings, and said with a boy-like flush that the reason he never did these things was not that he was afraid, for he would have loved to do them all, but because he was not quite like other boys; and, so saying, he let go my finger and faded from before my eyes into another and golden ether; but I shall ever hold that had he been quite like other boys there would have been none braver than my Timothy.

I fear I am not truly brave myself, for though when under fire, so far as I can recollect, I behaved as others, morally I seem to be deficient. So I discovered next day when I attempted to buy David's outfit, and found myself as shy of entering the shop as any Mary at the pawnbroker's. The shop for little garments seems very alarming when you reach the door; a man abruptly become a parent, and thus lost to a finer sense of the proprieties, may be able to stalk in unprotected, but apparently I could not. Indeed, I have allowed a repugnance to entering shops of any kind, save my tailor's, to grow on me, and to my tailor's I fear I go too frequently.

So I skulked near the shop of the little garments, jeering at myself, and it was strange to me to reflect at, say, three o'clock that if I had been brazen at half-past two all would now be over.

To show what was my state, take the case of the very gentleman-like man whom I detected gazing fixedly at me, or so I thought, just as I had drawn valiantly near the door. I sauntered away, but when I returned he was still there, which seemed conclusive proof that he had smoked my purpose. Sternly controlling my temper I bowed, and said with icy politeness, "You have the advantage of me, sir."

"I beg your pardon," said he, and I am now persuaded that my words turned his attention to me for the first time, but at the moment I was sure some impertinent meaning lurked behind his answer.

"I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance," I barked.

"No one regrets it more than I do," he replied, laughing.

"I mean, sir," said I, "that I shall wait here until you retire," and with that I put my back to a shop-window.

By this time he was grown angry, and said he, "I have no engagement," and he put his back to the shop-window. Each of us was doggedly determined to tire the other out, and we must have looked ridiculous. We also felt it, for ten minutes afterward, our passions having died away, we shook hands cordially and agreed to call hansoms.

Must I abandon the enterprise? Certainly I knew divers ladies who would make the purchases for me, but first I must explain, and, rather than explain it has ever been my custom to do without. I was in this despondency when a sudden recollection of Irene and Mrs. Hicking heartened me like a cordial, for I saw in them at once the engine and decoy by which David should procure his outfit.

You must be told who they were.