CHAPTER XXVI

"WHAT IT MUST BE TO YOU--JUST YOU!"

G. Selden, awakening to consciousness two days later, lay and stared at the chintz covering of the top of his four-post bed through a few minutes of vacant amazement. It was a four-post bed he was lying on, wasn't it? And his leg was bandaged and felt unmovable. The last thing he remembered was going down an incline in a tree-bordered avenue. There was nothing more. He had been all right then. Was this a four-post bed or was it not? Yes, it was. And was it part of the furnishings of a swell bedroom--the kind of bedroom he had never been in before? Tip top, in fact? He stared and tried to recall things--but could not, and in his bewilderment exclaimed aloud.

"Well," he said, "if this ain't the limit! You may search ME!"

A respectable person in a white apron came to him from the other side of the room. It was Buttle's wife, who had been hastily called in.

"Sh--sh," she said soothingly. "Don't you worry. Nobody ain't goin' to search you. Nobody ain't. There! Sh, sh, sh," rather as if he were a baby. Beginning to be conscious of a curious sense of weakness, Selden lay and stared at her in a helplessness which might have been considered pathetic. Perhaps he had got "bats in his belfry," and there was no use in talking.

At that moment, however, the door opened and a young lady entered. She was "a looker," G. Selden's weakness did not interfere with his perceiving. "A looker, by gee!" She was dressed, as if for going out, in softly tinted, exquisite things, and a large, strange hydrangea blue flower under the brim of her hat rested on soft and full black hair. The black hair gave him a clue. It was hair like that he had seen as Reuben S. Vanderpoel's daughter rode by when he stood at the park gates at Mount Dunstan. "Bats in his belfry," of course.

"How is he?" she said to the nurse.

"He's been seeming comfortable all day, miss," the woman answered, "but he's light-headed yet. He opened his eyes quite sensible looking a bit ago, but he spoke queer. He said something was the limit, and that we might search him."

Betty approached the bedside to look at him, and meeting the disturbed inquiry in his uplifted eyes, laughed, because, seeing that he was not delirious, she thought she understood. She had not lived in New York without hearing its argot, and she realised that the exclamation which had appeared delirium to Mrs. Buttle had probably indicated that the unexplainableness of the situation in which G. Selden found himself struck him as reaching the limit of probability, and that the most extended search of his person would fail to reveal any clue to satisfactory explanation.

She bent over him, with her laugh still shining in her eyes.

"I hope you feel better. Can you tell me?" she said.

His voice was not strong, but his answer was that of a young man who knew what he was saying.

"If I'm not off my head, ma'am, I'm quite comfortable, thank you," he replied.

"I am glad to hear that," said Betty. "Don't be disturbed. Your mind is quite clear."

"All I want," said G. Selden impartially, "is just to know where I'm at, and how I blew in here. It would help me to rest better."

"You met with an accident," the "looker" explained, still smiling with both lips and eyes. "Your bicycle chain broke and you were thrown and hurt yourself. It happened in the avenue in the park. We found you and brought you in. You are at Stornham Court, which belongs to Sir Nigel Anstruthers. Lady Anstruthers is my sister. I am Miss Vanderpoel."

"Hully gee!" ejaculated G. Selden inevitably. "Hully GEE!" The splendour of the moment was such that his brain whirled. As it was not yet in the physical condition to whirl with any comfort, he found himself closing

his eyes weakly.

"That's right," Miss Vanderpoel said. "Keep them closed. I must not talk to you until you are stronger. Lie still and try not to think. The doctor says you are getting on very well. I will come and see you again."

As the soft sweep of her dress reached the door he managed to open his eyes.

"Thank you, Miss Vanderpoel," he said. "Thank you, ma'am." And as his eyelids closed again he murmured in luxurious peace: "Well, if that's her--she can have ME--and welcome!"

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She came to see him again each day--sometimes in a linen frock and garden hat, sometimes in her soft tints and lace and flowers before or after her drive in the afternoon, and two or three times in the evening, with lovely shoulders and wonderfully trailing draperies--looking like the women he had caught far-off glimpses of on the rare occasion of his having indulged himself in the highest and most remotely placed seat in the gallery at the opera, which inconvenience he had borne not through any ardent desire to hear the music, but because he wanted to see the show and get "a look-in" at the Four Hundred. He believed very implicitly in his Four Hundred, and privately--though perhaps almost

unconsciously--cherished the distinction his share of them conferred upon him, as fondly as the English young man of his rudimentary type cherishes his dukes and duchesses. The English young man may revel in his coroneted beauties in photograph shops, the young American dwells fondly on flattering, or very unflattering, reproductions of his multi-millionaires' wives and daughters in the voluminous illustrated sheets of his Sunday paper, without which life would be a wretched and savourless thing.

Selden had never seen Miss Vanderpoel in his Sunday paper, and here he was lying in a room in the same house with her. And she coming in to see him and talk to him as if he was one of the Four Hundred himself! The comfort and luxury with which he found himself surrounded sank into insignificance when compared with such unearthly luck as this. Lady Anstruthers came in to see him also, and she several times brought with her a queer little lame fellow, who was spoken of as "Master Ughtred." "Master" was supposed by G. Selden to be a sort of title conferred upon the small sons of baronets and the like. The children he knew in New York and elsewhere answered to the names of Bob, or Jimmy, or Bill. No parallel to "Master" had been in vogue among them.

Lady Anstruthers was not like her sister. She was a little thing, and both she and Master Ughtred seemed fond of talking of New York. She had not been home for years, and the youngster had never seen it at all. He had some queer ideas about America, and seemed never to have seen anything but Stornham and the village. G. Selden liked him, and was

vaguely sorry for a little chap to whom a description of the festivities attendant upon the Fourth of July and a Presidential election seemed like stories from the Arabian Nights.

"Tell me about the Tammany Tiger, if you please," he said once. "I want to know what kind of an animal it is."

From a point of view somewhat different from that of Mount Dunstan and Mr. Penzance, Betty Vanderpoel found talk with him interesting. To her he did not wear the aspect of a foreign product. She had not met and conversed with young men like him, but she knew of them. Stringent precautions were taken to protect her father from their ingenuous enterprises. They were not permitted to enter his offices; they were even discouraged from hovering about their neighbourhood when seen and suspected. The atmosphere, it was understood, was to be, if possible, disinfected of agents. This one, lying softly in the four-post bed, cheerfully grateful for the kindness shown him, and plainly filled with delight in his adventure, despite the physical discomforts attending it, gave her, as he began to recover, new views of the life he lived in common with his kind. It was like reading scenes from a realistic novel of New York life to listen to his frank, slangy conversation. To her, as well as to Mr. Penzance, sidelights were thrown upon existence in the "hall bedroom" and upon previously unknown phases of business life in Broadway and roaring "downtown" streets.

His determination, his sharp readiness, his control of temper under

rebuff and superfluous harshness, his odd, impersonal summing up of men and things, and good-natured patience with the world in general, were, she knew, business assets. She was even moved--no less--by the remote connection of such a life with that of the first Reuben Vanderpoel who had laid the huge, solid foundations of their modern fortune. The first Reuben Vanderpoel must have seen and known the faces of men as G. Selden saw and knew them. Fighting his way step by step, knocking pertinaciously at every gateway which might give ingress to some passage leading to even the smallest gain, meeting with rebuff and indifference only to be overcome by steady and continued assault--if G. Selden was a nuisance, the first Vanderpoel had without doubt worn that aspect upon innumerable occasions. No one desires the presence of the man who while having nothing to give must persist in keeping himself in evidence, even if by strategy or force. From stories she was familiar with, she had gathered that the first Reuben Vanderpoel had certainly lacked a certain youth of soul she felt in this modern struggler for life. He had been the cleverer man of the two; G. Selden she secretly liked the better.

The curiosity of Mrs. Buttle, who was the nurse, had been awakened by a singular feature of her patient's feverish wanderings.

"He keeps muttering, miss, things I can't make out about Lord Mount Dunstan, and Mr. Penzance, and some child he calls Little Willie. He talks to them the same as if he knew them--same as if he was with them and they were talking to him quite friendly."

One morning Betty, coming to make her visit of inquiry found the patient looking thoughtful, and when she commented upon his air of pondering, his reply cast light upon the mystery.

"Well, Miss Vanderpoel," he explained, "I was lying here thinking of Lord Mount Dunstan and Mr. Penzance, and how well they treated me--I haven't told you about that, have I?

"That explains what Mrs. Buttle said," she answered. "When you were delirious you talked frequently to Lord Mount Dunstan and Mr. Penzance. We both wondered why."

Then he told her the whole story. Beginning with his sitting on the grassy bank outside the park, listening to the song of the robin, he ended with the adieux at the entrance gates when the sound of her horse's trotting hoofs had been heard by each of them.

"What I've been lying here thinking of," he said, "is how queer it was it happened just that way. If I hadn't stopped just that minute, and if you hadn't gone by, and if Lord Mount Dunstan hadn't known you and said who you were, Little Willie would have been in London by this time, hustling to get a cheap bunk back to New York in."

"Because?" inquired Miss Vanderpoel.

G. Selden laughed and hesitated a moment. Then he made a clean breast of

it.

"Say, Miss Vanderpoel," he said, "I hope it won't make you mad if I own up. Ladies like you don't know anything about chaps like me. On the square and straight out, when I seen you and heard your name I couldn't help remembering whose daughter you was. Reuben S. Vanderpoel spells a big thing. Why, when I was in New York we fellows used to get together and talk about what it'd mean to the chap who could get next to Reuben S. Vanderpoel. We used to count up all the business he does, and all the clerks he's got under him pounding away on typewriters, and how they'd be bound to get worn out and need new ones. And we'd make calculations how many a man could unload, if he could get next. It was a kind of typewriting junior assistant fairy story, and we knew it couldn't happen really. But we used to chin about it just for the fun of the thing.
One of the boys made up a thing about one of us saving Reuben S.'s life--dragging him from under a runaway auto and, when he says, 'What can I do to show my gratitude, young man?' him handing out his catalogue and saying, 'I should like to call your attention to the Delkoff, sir,' and getting him to promise he'd never use any other, as long as he lived!"

Reuben S. Vanderpoel's daughter laughed as spontaneously as any girl might have done. G. Selden laughed with her. At any rate, she hadn't got mad, so far.

"That was what did it," he went on. "When I rode away on my bike I got

thinking about it and could not get it out of my head. The next day I just stopped on the road and got off my wheel, and I says to myself: 'Look here, business is business, if you ARE travelling in Europe and lunching at Buckingham Palace with the main squeeze. Get busy! What'll the boys say if they hear you've missed a chance like this? YOU hit the pike for Stornham Castle, or whatever it's called, and take your nerve with you! She can't do more than have you fired out, and you've been fired before and got your breath after it. So I turned round and made time. And that was how I happened on your avenue. And perhaps it was because I was feeling a bit rattled I lost my hold when the chain broke, and pitched over on my head. There, I've got it off my chest. I was thinking I should have to explain somehow."

Something akin to her feeling of affection for the nice, long-legged Westerner she had seen rambling in Bond Street touched Betty again. The Delkoff was the centre of G. Selden's world as the flowers were of Kedgers', as the "little 'ome" was of Mrs. Welden's.

"Were you going to try to sell ME a typewriter?" she asked.

"Well," G. Selden admitted, "I didn't know but what there might be use for one, writing business letters on a big place like this. Straight, I won't say I wasn't going to try pretty hard. It may look like gall, but you see a fellow has to rush things or he'll never get there. A chap like me HAS to get there, somehow."

She was silent a few moments and looked as if she was thinking something over. Her silence and this look on her face actually caused to dawn in the breast of Selden a gleam of daring hope. He looked round at her with a faint rising of colour.

"Say, Miss Vanderpoel--say----" he began, and then broke off.

"Yes?" said Betty, still thinking.

"C-COULD you use one--anywhere?" he said. "I don't want to rush things too much, but--COULD you?"

"Is it easy to learn to use it?"

"Easy!" his head lifted from his pillow. "It's as easy as falling off a log. A baby in a perambulator could learn to tick off orders for its bottle. And--on the square--there isn't its equal on the market, Miss Vanderpoel--there isn't." He fumbled beneath his pillow and actually brought forth his catalogue.

"I asked the nurse to put it there. I wanted to study it now and then and think up arguments. See--adjustable to hold with perfect ease an envelope, an index card, or a strip of paper no wider than a postage stamp. Unsurpassed paper feed, practical ribbon mechanism--perfect and permanent alignment."

As Mount Dunstan had taken the book, Betty Vanderpoel took it. Never had G. Selden beheld such smiling in eyes about to bend upon his catalogue.

"You will raise your temperature," she said, "if you excite yourself. You mustn't do that. I believe there are two or three people on the estate who might be taught to use a typewriter. I will buy three. Yes--we will say three."

She would buy three. He soared to heights. He did not know how to thank her, though he did his best. Dizzying visions of what he would have to tell "the boys" when he returned to New York flashed across his mind. The daughter of Reuben S. Vanderpoel had bought three Delkoffs, and he was the junior assistant who had sold them to her.

"You don't know what it means to me, Miss Vanderpoel," he said, "but if you were a junior salesman you'd know. It's not only the sale--though that's a rake-off of fifteen dollars to me--but it's because it's YOU that's bought them. Gee!" gazing at her with a frank awe whose obvious sincerity held a queer touch of pathos. "What it must be to be YOU--just YOU!"

She did not laugh. She felt as if a hand had lightly touched her on her naked heart. She had thought of it so often--had been bewildered restlessly by it as a mere child--this difference in human lot--this chance. Was it chance which had placed her entity in the centre of Bettina Vanderpoel's world instead of in that of some little cash girl

with hair raked back from a sallow face, who stared at her as she passed in a shop--or in that of the young Frenchwoman whose life was spent in serving her, in caring for delicate dresses and keeping guard over ornaments whose price would have given to her own humbleness ease for the rest of existence? What did it mean? And what Law was laid upon her? What Law which could only work through her and such as she who had been born with almost unearthly power laid in their hands--the reins of monstrous wealth, which guided or drove the world? Sometimes fear touched her, as with this light touch an her heart, because she did not KNOW the Law and could only pray that her guessing at it might be right. And, even as she thought these things, G. Selden went on.

"You never can know," he said, "because you've always been in it. And the rest of the world can't know, because they've never been anywhere near it." He stopped and evidently fell to thinking.

"Tell me about the rest of the world," said Betty quietly.

He laughed again.

"Why, I was just thinking to myself you didn't know a thing about it. And it's queer. It's the rest of us that mounts up when you come to numbers. I guess it'd run into millions. I'm not thinking of beggars and starving people, I've been rushing the Delkoff too steady to get onto any swell charity organisation, so I don't know about them. I'm just thinking of the millions of fellows, and women, too, for the matter of

that, that waken up every morning and know they've got to hustle for their ten per or their fifteen per--if they can stir it up as thick as that. If it's as much as fifty per, of course, seems like to me, they're on Easy Street. But sometimes those that's got to fifty per--or even more--have got more things to do with it--kids, you know, and more rent and clothes. They've got to get at it just as hard as we have. Why, Miss Vanderpoel, how many people do you suppose there are in a million that don't have to worry over their next month's grocery bills, and the rent of their flat? I bet there's not ten--and I don't know the ten."

He did not state his case uncheerfully. "The rest of the world" represented to him the normal condition of things.

"Most married men's a bit afraid to look an honest grocery bill in the face. And they WILL come in--as regular as spring hats. And I tell YOU, when a man's got to live on seventy-five a month, a thing that'll take all the strength and energy out of a twenty-dollar bill sorter gets him down on the mat."

Like old Mrs. Welden's, his roughly sketched picture was a graphic one.

"'Tain't the working that bothers most of us. We were born to that, and most of us would feel like deadbeats if we were doing nothing. It's the earning less than you can live on, and getting a sort of tired feeling over it. It's the having to make a dollar-bill look like two, and watching every other fellow try to do the same thing, and not often make

the trip. There's millions of us--just millions--every one of us with his Delkoff to sell----" his figure of speech pleased him and he chuckled at his own cleverness--"and thinking of it, and talking about it, and--under his vest--half afraid that he can't make it. And what you say in the morning when you open your eyes and stretch yourself is, 'Hully gee! I've GOT to sell a Delkoff to-day, and suppose I shouldn't, and couldn't hold down my job!' I began it over my feeding bottle. So did all the people I know. That's what gave me a sort of a jolt just now when I looked at you and thought about you being YOU--and what it meant."

When their conversation ended she had a much more intimate knowledge of New York than she had ever had before, and she felt it a rich possession. She had heard of the "hall bedroom" previously, and she had seen from the outside the "quick lunch" counter, but G. Selden unconsciously escorted her inside and threw upon faces and lives the glare of a flashlight.

"There was a thing I've been thinking I'd ask you, Miss Vanderpoel," he said just before she left him. "I'd like you to tell me, if you please. It's like this. You see those two fellows treated me as fine as silk. I mean Lord Mount Dunstan and Mr. Penzance. I never expected it. I never saw a lord before, much less spoke to one, but I can tell you that one's just about all right--Mount Dunstan. And the other one--the old vicar--I've never taken to anyone since I was born like I took to him. The way he puts on his eye-glasses and looks at you, sorter kind and

curious about you at the same time! And his voice and his way of saying his words--well, they just GOT me--sure. And they both of 'em did say they'd like to see me again. Now do you think, Miss Vanderpoel, it would look too fresh--if I was to write a polite note and ask if either of them could make it convenient to come and take a look at me, if it wouldn't be too much trouble. I don't WANT to be too fresh--and perhaps they wouldn't come anyhow--and if it is, please won't you tell me, Miss Vanderpoel?"

Betty thought of Mount Dunstan as he had stood and talked to her in the deepening afternoon sun. She did not know much of him, but she thought--having heard G. Selden's story of the lunch--that he would come. She had never seen Mr. Penzance, but she knew she should like to see him.

"I think you might write the note," she said. "I believe they would come to see you."

"Do you?" with eager pleasure. "Then I'll do it. I'd give a good deal to see them again. I tell you, they are just It--both of them."