John Marshall's Sphere

Continued from First Page.

and touching "Mr. Marshall, I want to tell you somethin. I don't like this way of livin. I've never been very happy. Mother died when I was a slip of a girl, father he died before that, and I've took care of mother's father ever since. There ain't much grandness about we uns here, is there? So I don't know where it comes from, but I always feel like I was meant for better things. I feel like I'd be happy somewheres else, somewheres where it is grand and fine, and people are polite and cheerful; where I could be a lady born and hold up my own in a sphere, as you call it. Don't tell me I read it outen books; I don't. When I read in books 'bout the kind of a person I'd like to be I shut the book up and don't read no more. I guess people like I'd like to be wouldn't have gran'fathers that make matches for them, would they? It's sinful, it is awful. Why couldn't it be only love that makes matches? People like you don't get forced to marry, now do they?" Marshall only looked at her. "There," she went on, "I know I'm takin liberties. But I don't mean to. I ain't got anybody to talk to. If I talked to the women folks around here they'd only laugh at me, and please never mention El to me, please don't. I suppose I'll marry him—of course I will—some time. But please don't be like gran'father and the rest and think me a pore, ignorant, silly thing without a will of my own. And never mention El and marriage to me."

"I will not," he answered.

"Polly," called her grandfather, "somephin's scorchin. I smell 'em."

She flew to the iron she had thrown aside, from under which ascended smoke as from a sacrifice. Marshall left the window and walked along the margin of the stream that gave the mill its motor power. "I am even experiencing sensations," mused he. "And, heaven help the girl's innocence, fathers are fathers all the world over—sometimes grandfathers."

He saw Polly at dinner. She was cheerful and peaceful as a lady would have been who had gone through an experience such as hers and desired to blind the witness of her downbreak.

"Polly," said her grandfather at the end of the meal, "El's went away for a month. You have saw him for the last time for a matter of fower weeks. You've druv him off."

"I don't think so," she replied quietly. "He told me he was goin north to buy some machinery for the mill—that the stream wasn't to be depended on no longer."

"That's his perlite way o' puttin it to you; anyways he'll be back in time for the weddin—last o' June. So git your gownd ready." She returned no word to this, but calmly went on with her dinner. Marshall felt like throttling the grandfather. He tried to give Polly a reassuring glance, but she would not raise her eyes from her plate. Then he thought it best to protect her from any more of the old man's onslaught just then, so he led the netmaker to his eternal meshing, willy nilly.

"She got to do it," the old man grumbled. "She shan't shilly shally no more. Cur'ous how women is. A month or two sence and she never complained a word, but would do jest like I wanted her to do. Then she must git wild to go 'way a spell. Lord knows what she done, for when she comes back the change comes with her. But it's El. She gev him her promise, and it's El—and in June. Ain't he got a good house? Ain't he a prosperous young feller? No low down, hand to mouth man, he ain't."

"But"—

"No buts," the blind man cried, brooking no interruption. "I'm tellin family secrets, I know, but I dunno as I keer to be advised in 'em."

"I was merely about to ask you who buys your nets?" languidly said Marshall.

The old man viciously tugged at his cords and refused to answer any irrelevant questions.

Marshall sauntered down to the paddock where Polly came to milk the cow. He pitied her, but he dared not say a word. Still he could keep near her now and then, and if she were not as sodden as her surroundings she would understand his sympathy.

Pretty soon he saw her coming with her stool and pail. She nodded, but took no further notice of him, caught the cow, did the milking, went to the house again, and never a word to her sympathizer.

Several evenings he was down there when she came. She would say a word now and then, smiling wanly. Having such a good chance to see her face in a bright light he found that she looked paler than she had been when he had first taken up his abode in the house. Then he found that the pail of milk was heavy for her—she the strong one. Once he offered to carry the pail for her. She repulsed him coldly and walked away with it.

He believed that she had wakeful nights and days of bitter thought, and all because she did not love the man she had promised to marry. Had any one the right to interfere, to feel so interested as to be more than indignant? At any rate Polly faded more rapidly than the month of May.

June came and the miller. He was filled with determination. The first visit he made he spoke of the wedding.

"I come earlier'n I'd 'spected," he said, "but I wanted to git to Memphis after the north, 'n I heered the fever'd commenced early 'n I'd better stir my stumps before it got headway."

"The fever'll be putty bad this summer," announced the netmaker. "It nigh skipped last year."

"Bad or not bad, 'twon't tech Polly and me at the mill," laughed the miller. "And now how 'bout the weddin, Polly?"

"El," she said finally, "you must give me till August. I give you my word that I won't say 'no' in August. There, now, I never gave my word to it before; 'twas always gran'father. But now you must give me till August."

Marshall looked at her, disappointed in her. Yet something about her interested him. She appeared quite bright and happy, although there was a wild light in her eyes.

"Mr. Marshall!" she asked quietly.

He was conscious of talk going on between the two men, of argument in which she did not take a part, and he knew that she had prevailed, that the marriage would take place in August instead of in June. She gave the miller her hand on it, and Marshall walked away.

He walked down to the paddock. He was disgusted with her. He wondered why. Was it because she had excited conjecture in him and allowed it to lead to nothing?

He found himself comparing her with Jane and wondering if Jane had ever—oh, no; Jane had acquiesced to everything her father had proposed, as had her fiance also.

And here came Polly, marching along, straight as an arrow, as proudly as a princess. He did not speak, nor did she. She caught the cow and led her to the usual spot in the paddock. When the pail was bubbling and frothing nearly to the brim, she put it on her arm and took her way to the house.

All at once she wheeled around and faced Marshall.

"You think I'm no sort of a woman, don't you?" she asked.

"[illegible] an," he answered.

She seemed to weigh his words and then to comprehend them, for, shrugging her thin shoulders and laughing, she walked aside from him.

Next day she went about her work almost cheery.

"Women is queer," remarked her grandfather. "They're happy and unhappy, and it's all a-one."

But Marshall had no eyes or ears for grandfather or lover. He could not keep faroff Jane out of his mind, though before this it had not been an insuperably difficult matter. How easily had Jane acquiesced with her father's wishes and the wishes of Marshall's father.

Polly brightened day by day. Day by day Marshall came across her wherever he chanced to be. He began to think it strange that he should meet her so often, especially as he desired to be alone and think out the maze of doubts she had awakened in him regarding Jane's state of mind and affections.

All of July Polly was the cheerfulest of women. Marshall slowly growing to be the gloomiest of men. On the first day of August, a hot, sultry, enervating day, Marshall came upon her in the paddock. She was intently poring over a newspaper. She started when she saw him and slipped the paper under some leaves. She milked the cow and went away. Marshall found the paper. She had folded the sheet to a small size at a glowing account of the ravages of yellow fever in Memphis.

"She read that because that lout of a miller spoke of the fever when he came home in June. He is more to her than she will acknowledge, even to herself. I suppose women grow to love the men they've engaged themselves to after all. I'll write to Jane tomorrow," said he.

That night Marshall was robbed. He was dimly conscious of whisking garments in his room, of a face held close to his, and, half awake, determined to open his eyes and see what it meant. Instead he went soundly to sleep.

In the morning he found his wallet on the table, a part of its contents gone. As he stood there recalling his hazy night experience he heard a loud scream in the room below. Running thither he found the old netmaker in a frenzy tearing at a sheet of paper in his hand. He caught hold of Marshall.

"Read it to me!" he cried. "But know what it means—Polly's went. She's nowheres around, and she's left this letter. Read it to me! Read it to me!"

Marshall took the paper. It told her grandfather that she had gone to Memphis to nurse. In the midst of the storm of expletives raised by the note Marshall escaped.

Did he understand the girl? Had she hoarded up the words the miller had spoken when he came back in June? Had she put off her marriage until August knowing that the fever would be worse then and that she should go to Memphis and to death? Had she taken the money from the wallet for her ticket to the doomed city? Was she weak? Was she strong? He only knew that she did not love the man she had promised to marry. When he went back to the house, the miller was there.

"This is what comes o' takin sarpints into your bosom!" cried the netmaker. "Somebody orter go after her. Wisht I had my eyes—wouldn't she come in a hurry! Yes, somebody must fetch her home."

"But the fever!" said the miller dejectedly. "She'll mebbe die, and so will them that goes after her."

"Would fear of your own life deter you from trying to save hers?"

It was Marshall who spoke.

"I got my life to think of," the miller blurted out. "I got her gran'father to think of, a pore, blind, ole man. S'posin I went for her, and me and her both died. What'll become o' him then? No, daddy," to the netmaker, who was rapidly becoming maudlin when he heard himself pitied, "s'long as I got a crust it's half yourn. Besides, Mist' Marshall, you don't know what Yallow Jack's like, or you wouldn't speak so bold."

"Then you will not go after her—will not make an effort to save her even at this early stage?"

"Mist' Marshall"—

"You do not love her!" cried Marshall.

"Does she love me?" demanded the miller. "Ain't I got no feelins of a man? Would she go 'way if she keered for me? Don't she go 'way to get rid o' me and the weddin? Ain't there been force work 'nough? But love her! I love her as I never loved no other woman, nor never shall. There!"

The netmaker was in tears.

"She's a dis'bedient girl," he said, "and she's give me a world o' trouble with her wills and her won'ts. I'll never [illegible] her name mentioned. I [illegible] her off—she's went ag'in an honest man that'd make her a good husband, and she's deserted her ole, blind gran'father that's kep' a home over her head the best he could, workin day in and day out to do it. Henceforrard I ain't got no grandaughter. El," straightening himself, "lift me down the family Bible. Find me the place o' the births." The miller took the book from the fair, white cloth Polly had ever kept it in to protect it. "Now, her name," the netmaker said, and the miller guided his gnarled finger to a certain line. "Here I cast her off." Dampening his finger, he ran it across a name, leaving a long black smear upon the white surface. "I ain't got nobody in all the wide world that's got my blood in 'em." And he fell back in the miller's arms, crying aloud for Polly, his dead daughter's child, the girl he had worked for all her life.

Marshall left the two men. He wandered about the place for an hour or more, a ringing in his ears. When he returned to the house, the netmaker informed him that as there was no one to keep the house it would be forthwith closed, the miller having offered to provide for the forsaken old man for the rest of his life or until something might be heard regarding Polly.

Marshall packed his bag. On the 6th of August he was in his native city once more, a hot, sweltering city. A pile of letters awaited him, for he had not left any address behind him when he went away in search of nature, and the epistles had accumulated. There was but one from Jane Cristowell. Jane told him that the viscount she had met on the Adriatic had gone beyond all precedent and begged her to admire him sufficiently to accept him, the title of viscountess and a house in the Faubourg St. Germain. She had sent the viscount adrift, and she laughed at him whenever she thought of him. Then, after all, did Jane care a little for the man she would marry? He softly laid the letter aside. He staid indoors all day. Toward evening he opened his bag and emptied it of its contents. Out fell a handkerchief with a piece of paper in its folds.

"I took your money to pay for my ticket to Memphis," wrote Polly. "I think you understand me better than the rest, and maybe if I'd been in your sphere we'd been more friendly. I don't love El and I can't marry him because"—

"Aha!" cried Marshall, smiting his forehead. "What an idiot I have been not to see the truth. She writes, 'I don't love El and I can't marry him because I love somebody else.' Poor Polly, you love somebody else and can't marry the miller, and Jane couldn't accept the title of viscountess because she— If Jane loved me, would she write only of the viscount and how she couldn't help laughing at him every time she thinks of him? I fear he was 'sans teeth, sans everything,' even a bank account. Forgive me, Jane, but I am not well acquainted with you yet. But Jane has lots of protectors—her father and me—and whom has Polly? Not that curmudgeon of a grandfather, with his melodramatic striking of her name from the family Bible; not the miller. Has she nobody to befriend her, nobody to save her? She has. She shall not die if a fool and a snob can do anything. And would Jane refuse to let me go to Memphis after the poor little woman?"

That night he went toward Memphis. When he reached the city, he understood the horror of a sickness he had only hitherto read about. He heard the tap, tap of the hammers on the rude unpainted coffins. He saw the long trenches which were graves for 25 at a time. Sisters in black gowns and stiffly starched caps flitted noiselessly past him in the awful heat, entering houses with the mark on them. He saw thieves bearing forth valuables which only the dead might claim. And where was Polly?

He went from station to station. Even the commission could tell him nothing.

He took to questioning the sisters when he met them, for Polly's love of the unknown man appealed to him as nothing had ever before appealed to him. He would find her, restore her to the man she cared for, maybe set the man up in business if he were poor. Yet how could he be poor when Polly loved him enough to die for her love—poor Polly!

A sister approached him. He was about to address to her the inquiry he had made a hundred times when she forestalled him.

"Mr. Marshall?" she asked quietly.

"Sister, I am searching for a young girl named Polly Lasher," he said in return. "For two days I have looked for her here."

"I came from her," the sister said. "She saw you pass by yesterday, and she begged me to watch for you and give you this." He took the paper she held out to him, wondering, and read in Polly's irregular writing: "I couldn't pay back the money, but you'll forgive me. Please remember the time I told you I'd seen you at Katco—you remembered me, you know. I'd often seen you with the children in Katco before that day you saw me. When I knew you saw me, I came home. It was after I had seen you that I couldn't care for El no more. I told you in a note I slipped in your handkerchief I loved some one besides El. It is you. I kissed you the night I took the money. Please don't be angry. We could never a-been nothing to each other in this world, for I ain't in your sphere. But please don't forget me, please don't."

He crumpled the paper in his hand. "Where is she? Take me to her."

"Hush!" The sister touched his arm. "I wanted to call to you yesterday when you passed by, but she would not let me—she feared you might take the fever from her."

"Then she has it. Take me to her."

"Hush!" again said the sister soothingly. "She was too frail to act as a nurse, but she insisted upon it. She had one of the worst cases. We told her yesterday how it was, and she was satisfied, and, may I say it, she was a little afraid when she saw you. She feared you had come to Memphis for her grandfather's sake to take her home again"—

"Take me to her, I say. Why are you keeping me here?"

"Friend, she passed away very quietly in the early evening. She was buried before sunrise this morning."

Marshall caught the woman's shoulder in his grasp.

"Oh, sister, sister, I"—

But then he thought of Jane Cristowell.

THE END.

CARE OF THE WOUNDED IN NAVAL WARFARE

Continued From First Page.

water tanks will hold nine thousand gallons. The ship will carry four steam launches and four barges, each barge arranged with a flying floor between the thwarts, so as conveniently to carry twelve cots on the floor. There will be beds for two hundred and seventy-four and hammock space for eighty-six, staterooms for eight disabled officers and cot space for twelve. The forward ward on the upper deck has been left with only one tier of berths for a ward of isolation or to accommodate more serious cases. The vessel can comfortably accomodate three hundred and thirty sick or wounued men, with sufficient berthing space for the crew of the vessel. There are quarters for four medical men, two apothecaries, and twelve nurses. . . . Near the center of the ship on the berth deck is the operating room, eighteen by twenty-one feet. It is well lighted by a large skylight and by air ports above the deck. . . . As soon as the action is over, a launch should tow its barge alongside a vessel that has been in action, the wounded should be hoisted out and into the barge, and it should then steam away with all dispatch to the ambulance ship, unload its human freight, and speed away again on its misson of humanity."

The naval authorities have, it is announced, decided to act on this suggestion, and have purchased the Cromwell liner Creole, which is being as quickly as possible converted into a floating hospital in the Newport News shipyard. This vessel is intended to accompany the North Atlantic squadron now off Key West, and her speed will enable her to keep up with the fleet.

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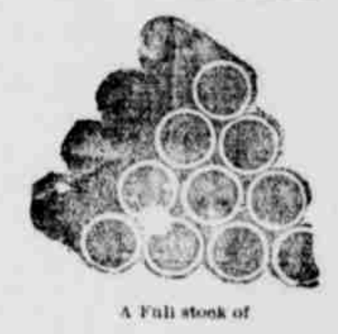

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