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Ch'town, May 14, 1898.

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CHAPTER VII. "Purposely! Why should I?"

They were smoking their morning cigars on the side veranda where the Lamarque rose interposed sweet smelling clusters of blossom and leaf between them and the sun's direct rays. Adrien leaned slightly forward as he asked that question and flipped the ash from his cigar down upon the border of white violets that clothed the rose tree's gnarled roots. His mother was there, too, with her large key basket sitting on the floor by the side of her chair. She was putting a delicate patch in a damask tablecloth that was too precious an heirloom to be lightly flung away. She could only see Adrien's beautiful profile from where she sat, and the pink carnation he had pinned on the lapel of his drab velvet shooting jacket wafted its odor toward her. It was the peaceful, happiest hour of all the day to her.

"To be sure, why should you? It is very commendable of you preserving such reticence about a man who has once been your schoolmate, but I think I am entitled to know what you know. You need not hesitate. Redmond has put me in possession of the whole story. I simply wanted your view of the case. What was Strong's trouble at Shingleton?"

"If Redmond has put you in possession of the whole story, you don't need to hear it afresh from me, grandpa. I think Strong made a fool of himself and damaged his reputation irretrievably. No one regrets it more than I do."

"But what did he do?"  
"Invited suspicion. A lot of trumpery had disappeared from various rooms in the college, stolen by the servants, of course, but when it came to \$50 in cash and Professor Redmond's watch a stir was made and the faculty took it into their sapient heads that one of the boys was the culprit and must be made an example of. A devil of a muss they kicked up too."

"Preposterous!" the governor ejaculated excitedly.  
"Absurd!" Mrs. Strong murmured breathlessly.

"Of course, but, preposterous and absurd as it may appear, they had Lawyer Sephar out to harangue the fellows and his eloquence acted upon poor old Strong like a revival sermon. It stirred him almost to the pitch of turning tale-bearer—that is, if he really knew anything. He held his tongue, however, succeeding only in convincing everybody that if there was a criminal there unwhipped of justice it must be Strong Martin himself. I talked to him, but I could make no headway against old Sephar's forensic eloquence. That is all there is to the business. I had rather not have spoken of this, grandpa, for suspicions once voiced rapidly crystallize into convictions, and a strong case against a man can sometimes be worked up from the most impalpable nothings."

A moment of admiring silence followed this expression of fine feeling. The governor removed his spectacles and rubbed them absently. Mrs. Strong passed her gold tumbler caressingly over the daintiest of patches in her fine damask. Adrien was a great comfort to them both.

"Very true and very creditable to you, boy," said the governor, having fully digested Adrien's remarks, "but, given your impalpable nothings, individual bias must have something to do with building up your case, and the bias was with Martin, if I understand matters."

"Yes—but"—  
"He was not a gentleman. That explains it all. The plebeian strain permitted him to feel uneasiness for fear that suspicion might rest upon him."

This explanation of Strong's attitude was delivered by Mrs. Strong in her mellow soprano. She could accredit any amount of gaucherie and moral obliquity to a plebeian strain in man or woman.

After that Adrien had flung his cigar away and, taking his cap and gun, had gone down to the stables to countermand his orders for the drag. He had lost all desire to renew his acquaintance with Amy Chambliss immediately. He had struck a discordant note in the harmony of the day and was out of tune with the mild refulgence of the October skies, the searching fragrance of the Mespilus plants, the vivid beauty of the goldenrod, the nutty pungence of the pecan grove, one and all of which challenged his languid notice in that short walk from the big house to the harness room.

He had been reared in the school of polite observations, however, so he had turned at the foot of the steps and, holding his cap in his hand, notified his mother of his change of programme. "I shan't go over to the Chamblisses this morning, dearest."

"I am sorry. I think they are rather expecting you. You will find Amy very much improved. She is one of the nicest girls we have." His mother's voice was gentle reproachful.

"I remember her as a gray faced little thing with big owl eyes, a large head full of brains and a maximum of freckles. Is my memory correct?"  
"Don't leave out the large heart full of constancy, son."  
"And she's not one of your modern girls, self reliant and courageous. A grasshopper among her petticoats will make her scream; feminine to the core, sir. Your true woman is always a bit of a coward, bless her heart. I love her for it too." This from the governor.  
"I imagine men always love the woman best who cannot give them an opportunity to show their own superiority, don't they, grandpa?"  
"Off with you, sir. You are an impudent rogue. If I was 20 years younger, I would court Amy myself and outwalk you for a shot at the partridges too."

(To be Continued.)



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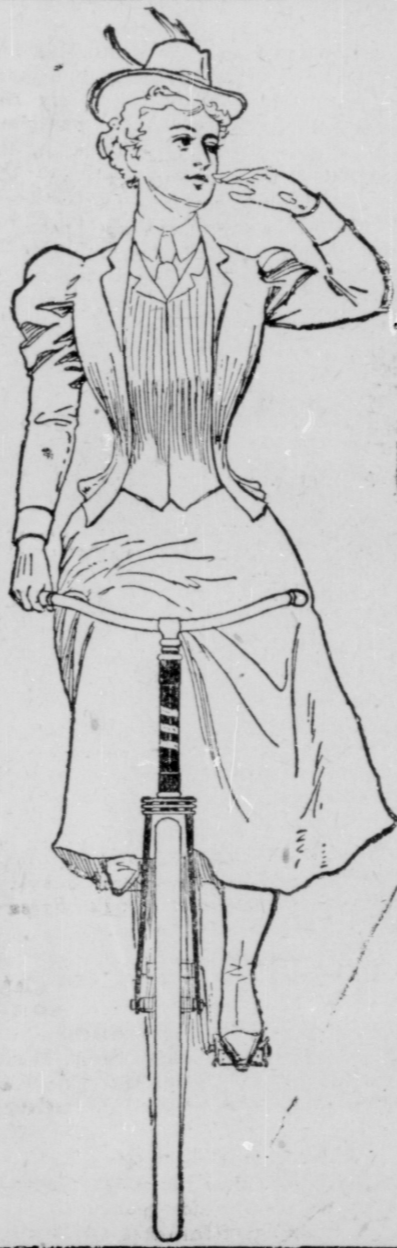
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