...avenues
...e explanation to be
...one of his freaks.
...were looking tired. We may not
...ave another such night in a month."

In the half hour they did not speak half a dozen sentences, and yet when he set down at her own door, and held her hand for a minute as he said farewell, Thekla felt that they were nearer each other than ever before. She found his violets when she went in, lying on the hall table, and took them carefully away to be freshened and kept alive on her toilet table.

Mrs. Vandewater had a bad night that night. Thekla ministered to her carefully and kindly. In the hush of those awful hours before day break the invalid called to her young nurse.

"You'r a good child, dear. You have been as good to me as if you had been my flesh and blood. I've come to love you as I never thought to love anything human again. If I die—and I may to-night, or any other night—you will find I have done for you all I could. We will not talk about it.

Mrs. Vandewater did not die, but remembering what she had said, when the outside impression drifted to Thekla's ears the rumor that she was to be heir of her friend's possessions, it is not strange that she half credited it herself. The possibility opened a strange future before her. Mrs. Vandewater lived in a style of ease and comfort quite eovnl in Thekla's eyes. Her income came from some English source. The lady was reticent, and Thekla never asked questions. But it all helped to unsettle her still more.

The day after Mrs. Vandewater took her first drive, Miss Thekla was summonto the drawing room to meet Mr. Nicolson. In occupation of the past weeks she had had very little opportunity to think about him or his purposes. No girl ever went to meet the final question with less determination as to her answer. She knew his errand the moment she entered the room. Not that he was confused, or hesitating, or any way disconcerted.

They said the usual things about the weather and the amusements of the day, and then a pause fell. Thekla waited for her companion to break it, perfectly sure of what would come next.

"My dear young lady," he said deferentially, "I want your permission to ask you a personal question."

She bowed unhesitatingly.

"You have it. I am perfectly sure that any question Mr. Nicolson may ask will not need permission given beforehand."

"Thank you. I wish to ask in regard to a report which I have heard several times. I have been told that you are a German—that you are the wife of a German noble—a relative of Madame Vandewater. May I ask if this is true?"

Thekla laughed. The man's solemnity struck her sense of the ludicrous. She and Frank Thorpe had laughed together over quite as absurd versions of her private history.

Mr. Nicolson looked somewhat surprised. His mind was so charged with the weighty matter that was coming that he could not comprehend her mood.

"I beg your pardon," Thekla said, seeing the expression of his face. "But it is so ridiculously far from the truth. My name is my own name, Mr. Nicholson, and I am the unmarried daughter of a Berkshire County farmer.

Thank you;" bowing with a stately politeness that checked all disposition to mirth in the young lady. "Then there is no reason why I should not ask you the question which brought me here." And then, in a speech which was more like a set oration than anything else, Thekla had ever heard, he offered her his hand, his name, and the queendom of his British possessions.

She was very sober before the speech was finished. The man's pomposity was not funny any more. The thought of saying no to such a stately piece of oratory as that, frightened and flattered her, did say it very sweetly and gracefully, but also very decidedly, and Mr. Nicolson went away very red in the face and a good deal regretfallen.

She went up stairs to Mrs. Vandewater.

"Aunt, I've done it. And I'm so surprised."

"At what?"

"I've refused Mr. Nicolson."

"My dear, I always thought you would."

"Did you? You astute woman. I always fancied that if he asked me to be Mrs. Nicolson, I should say yes."

"Perhaps you will be sorry by-and-by that you haven't."

"Perhaps. I shall never be surprised at anything again. Dear me, I wonder if there's anything in the world left worth careing for."

With which irrelevant exclamation the young lady dissolved in tears. Mrs. Vandewater watched her sharply.

"If you are grieving about what you've done, my dear, we might send a note after him, saying that you've repented."

"But I haven't. I'm crying over the contrariness of things. Don't let us think any more about it."

"I shall not, certainly. But dear, you know that this man offered you as good a ...o there had been. There, talk ...out something else. You needn't be entertaining any more."

"I wonder," leaning toward her, a slow fire gathering in his dreamy eyes, "if I should find an earthquake waiting for me if I followed Mr. Nicolson's example?"

"Mr. Nicolson's steps carried him down the street, you said. How can I tell what you might find there."

"Miss Rawdon," the servant announced, and that put an end to it all.

Up stairs Mrs. Vandewater was communing with herself.

"The little fool. She will throw away every chance for the sake of a girl's whim, and nothing I can say will stop her. If Frank Thorpe asks her to-day, she will refuse him simply out of a pique with herself."

But he did not ask her, as we have seen, and when she came up stairs again Mrs. Vandewater said to her, quietly and dispassionately:

"Thekla I don't choose to ask you questions nor to give advice. But it is easy to do in an hour what a lifetime is none too long to spend in repentance for. Ask yourself if Frank Thorpe were to be taken out of your life irremediably, if any one else you know could take his place."

Thekla made no answer. When she looked up, her mentor had taken up her reading. The young lady went out, shut herself up, and came to the conclusion. She reasoned herself into a conviction that she was in love with Frank Thorpe, or if not actually in that position, that she might easily find herself there. And because passive patience was not possible just then, she gathered up all John Elsworth's gifts and letters and small reminders, and put them out of her sight, as if he had anything to do with it.

The crisis was not far off. Coming in from an errand that night, she found all the dimly-lighted house empty, and went on from room to room till in the library—a dingy, book-filled room where no one ever went—she opened the door on Frank Thorpe.

"Since you were not at home, I came to find for myself a volume Mrs. Vandewater had promised," he explained. But he closed the door as he gave her a chair as if the *tete-a-tete* was a part of his plan.

She looked up at his pale face and shining eyes, and felt her heart sink. And yet this was the conclusion to which she had reasoned herself a few hours ago.

And then five minutes of talk, in which her part was monosyllabic, and Frank Thorpe had proposed and been accepted, and she was crying quietly with her head on the library table, and he was walking the room in an *agitato* movement.

"We might as well begin with a clean record," he said, with a good deal of hard earnestness in his voice. "You are not my first love, Thekla. Not quite two years ago she jilted me. I was in an awful spoony condition—there's no denying it, and for a few weeks I thought it would be the death of me. I never knew what the trouble was. One morning, after I had come back from a six weeks' business trip, my letters and trinkets came back to me. There was not a word of explanation, and I did not choose to ask any. When I had tired myself out, and was in a condition to lie down in the dust at her feet, the house was shut up and the family in Europe. That's the whole of it."

"And when the family comes back from Europe?" Thekla was setting quite erect now, with her intent eyes on his troubled face.

"I do not know that they will ever come. Perhaps they are of 'the good New Yorkers' who have 'gone to Paris' as their final reward," with a ghastly approach to a smile. "You know as much about it as I do."

"And the young lady's name?"

"Woman fashion, you cannot omit a shred from your pound of flesh. Ruby Prescott."

"Ruby Prescott? Why, that is the lady I met this afternoon. Just home from abroad—in Paris mourning—her father and mother both died somewhere in France in the spring, and she came home with the Van Meters."

"Thekla," staring at her with eager eyes, "I can't believe it," dropping into a chair. "My poor darling—"

A flash of color shot up in Thekla's face. She went and stood by him with her hand on his shoulder.

"It seems to me, Erank," in her most common-place, practical voice, "that the little arrangement we entered into ten minutes ago might as well be quietly annulled. Your 'poor darling' is at present with the Van Meters. It isn't too late for a call. Hadn't you better go up there at once, and re-arrange your programme?"

"I don't know. Thekla, you will think me a scoundrel, but I believe I love her yet."

"Of course you do—who doubts it? There don't say a woman can't be generous. Think of my agonies in releasing you, and go as soon as possible."

"You *are* generous, dear."

"That depends on our relative estimate of the sacrifice. Good-night."

After that nothing could keep her in the city. Mrs. Vandewater did not need her absolutely, being almost recovered, and there was no reason why she should not go. She made feverish haste to get away.

Three days after her arrival there, driving her old-fashioned pony chaise through the green country road, she came upon John Ellsworth walking. He accepted her invitation to ride, and they talked neighborhood news perseveringly.

"It is so good to be at home again. I was thoroughly and entirely homesick."

"I use the old friend's right to be inquisitive. When are you to be married?"

"Never," with a burst vehemence, "unless you—oh, John!" with a hysterical sob.

At home a telegram awaited her. Mrs. Vandewater was dead.

She hurried back to the lately brilliant house. She went through the horrible ceremonial of the funeral like one in a bad dream. Everybody supposed she was the heiress of the dead woman's estate, and assumed a position toward her accordingly.

And when it all was over, and they went back to the empty house, it came out that, besides her personal belongings, Mrs. Vandewater had nothing to give. Everything had been sunk in an annuity in some English company. So, beyond the half-worn dresses and personal adornings, Thekla was not an heiress at all.

And this was what the neighbors said about it:

"After she found she could not get either of those city fellows and that old lady disappointed her about her money, she came back here and took John Ellsworth. And he put up with it; but then there's no fool like a man when he's in love with a girl like that."

...one a star,
...advanced so far,
And counted the mouths each with an R.
And brought me Patty—Oyster Patty!
—[New York Sun.

Her True Love.

BY MISS KATE RICHMOND.

[Conclusion.]

One frosty, sparkling morning, Thekla had been out for a walk. On the way she had met Frank Thorpe, as she was very apt to do. He accompanied her home, and entered the house with her. There Thekla, feeling unusually bright herself, began lecturing him on his purposeless life.

"If I were a man," emphatically.

"Thank heaven you are not. However, go on."

"You put me out, Mr. Thorpe, why don't you do something?"

"Do something? Don't I? I am your devoted attendant three-fourths of my waking life.

"Yes, and get yourslf and me talked about by everybody. Not that I care, certainly," hurriedly to cover her blunder. "I shall choose my friends where I please," making matters worse, of course.

He sat up with sudden energy.

"Miss Thekla, if I were a woman—"

"Thank heaven, you are not."

"Exactly. However, if I were, I certainly wouldn't flirt with that antediluvian relic, Mr. Nicholson."

"Mr. Thorpe, I don't."

"Miss Thekla—I beg your pardon—you certainly do."

She looked at him with an astonished red in her cheeks and light in her eyes. Then she laughed frankly and good-naturedly.

"You see," leaning forward and laying his hand confidentially on her arm, "I can't bear to see a clear-hearted, honest girl lowering herself to the ways of these artificial, brainless girls, who have been bred up all their lives to the business of catching a husband. You don't need any such paltry ambition. Wait till you find a man worth falling in love with, and then marry him. Wait forever, if you don't find him."

Thekla sat motionless with astonishment. If any dumb thing had found a voice, she could not have been more amazed. And she had felt so fully called to administer advice.

While she sat, his hand still on her arm and her eyes on his face, the door opened, and John Ellsworth was ushered in.

Thekla swept toward him, with eager hands held out.

"Why John! Why John!" was all she could say.

And Frank Thorpe, being disturbed by this new comer, who was called John and received with such an outbreak of enthusiasm, gathered himself up and lounged away.

John Ellsworth was in the city for a fortnight. Mrs. Vandewather treated him with great politeness, and was always in the way in the most natural manner in the world when he came. Thekla always accepted his invitations, and three-fourths of the time, when the time came for their fulfilment, there was some perfectly just and unavoidable obstacle in the way. Meantime Mr. Nicolson's attentions grew more pointed, and Frank Thorpe kept out of the way.

Then Lent came, and there was a sudden cessation of gayety. John was called out of the city by his father's illness, and Thekla felt the inevitable reaction. And she did not know that she would live through it, and be ready and eager for another season when the time came.

It was alike everywhere. In the narrow circle out of which she had come there were jealousies and heartburnings, and petty scheming—no better and no worse than she had come to know in the past weeks, though possibly less disguised by smooth, conventional polish of manner. Wait till she met a man she loved! She might wait till she was gray and blind. There had never appeared one to whom she would give a second thought, unless it were—well, perhaps John Ellsworth, if the life that would follow with him were too narrow to breathe in; or Frank Thorpe, if he were not too lazy to speak. And then, by contrast, there came a vision of Mr. Nicolson's English home, of which he had the good taste to say very little. A land old enough to have lost the horrible sense of newness that belonged to everything on this side of the water. She was growing to have a little mania on the subject. She wanted three hours more sleep out of the twenty-four, and she thought she was tired of a commonplace life.

If she had showed the first symptom of her moods to Mr. Nicolson, he would have desisted from his attentions at once. Here was youth and beauty in a statuesque state of perfection. That was what he wanted—the statuesqueness; and everybody considered it a settled affair.

I think Thekla began to consider it herself. She had just one letter from John Ellsworth after his return, and he said, "I love you, Thekla, and—I wonder when you will tell me that you are to be married."

She did not answer the letter. But she was cross even with Mrs. Vandewater for two days after it.

Then she was seized with a fit of homesickness, and but that her friend was taken suddenly and really ill, nothing would have kept her in the city. But she had not the heart to leave the woman who had been so kind to her now that she could in some measure repay that kindness. All through Mrs. Vandewater's illness she was a very faithful nurse. Apparently Mr. Nicolson found her more charming than ever, now that the calm blonde beauty grew a little worn and weary-looking. He came more frequently than ever; in his way was very kind and considerate. Frank Thorpe was in and out, not so frequently as before that morning when John Ellsworth had come, but often enough to keep himself in her thoughts.

One night, a lovely, spring-like sunkown in February, Thekla was passing wearily through the hall, when the door swung open as if a great burst of wind had swept it in, and Frank Thorpe entered. ...ance the languor and weariness had ...n him; his tread was firm, his ... drawn proudly back. He brought ... freshness with him; its odors ... of violets he held out to ...

... did not know; so the ... and the little ... —I'll

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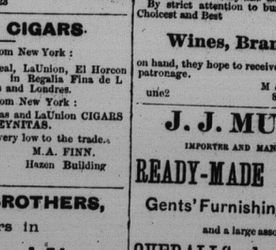


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