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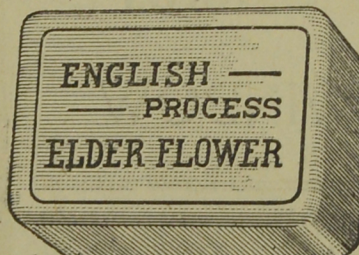
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Chapter 18

IN the course of the happy moments he had alone with Carroll, Orde arrived at a more intimate plane of conversation with her. He came to an understanding of her unquestioning acceptance of Mrs. Bishop's attitude. Carroll truly believed that none but herself could perform for her mother the various petty offices that lady demanded from her next of kin and that her practical slavery was due by every consideration of filial affection. In his hotel room he brooded over the state of affairs until his thoughts took a very gloomy tinge indeed. To begin with, in spite of his mother's assurance he had no faith in his own cause. His acquaintance with Carroll was but an affair of months, and their actual meetings comprised incredibly few days. Orde was naturally humble minded. It did not seem conceivable to him that he could win her without a long courtship. And superadded was the almost intolerable weight of Carroll's ideas as to her domestic duties.

Nevertheless, at the very moment when he had made up his mind that it would be utterly useless even to indulge in hope for some years to come, he spoke. It came about suddenly and entirely without premeditation.

The two had escaped for a breath of air late in the evening. Following the conventions, they merely strolled to the end of the block and back, always within sight of the house. Carroll was in a tired and pensive mood. She held her head back, breathing deeply.

"It's only a little strip, but it's the stars," said she, looking up to the sky between the houses. "They're so quiet and calm and big."

She seemed to Orde for the first time like a little girl. A wave of tenderness lifted Orde from his feet. He leaned over, his breath coming quickly.

"Carroll!" he said.

"No, no! You mustn't!" she cried. She did not pretend to misunderstand.

"It's life or death with me," he said. "I must not!" she cried, fluttering like a bird. "I promised myself long ago that I must always, always take care of mother."

"Please, please, dear," pleaded Orde. He had nothing more to say than this, just the simple incoherent symbols of pleading, but in such crises it is rather the soul than the tongue that speaks. His hand met hers and closed about it. "Don't you care for me, dear?" asked Orde very gently.

"I have no right to tell you that," answered she. "I have tried, oh, so hard, to keep you from saying this, for I knew I had no right to hear you."

"You do care for me!" he cried.

They had mounted the steps and stood just within the vestibule.

"Carroll," cried Orde, "tell me that you love me! Tell me that you'll marry me!"

"It would kill mother if I should leave her," she said sadly.

"But you must marry me," pleaded Orde. "We are made for each other. God meant us for each other."

"It would have to be after a great many years," she said doubtfully. "Good night. Come to me tomorrow." She slipped inside the half open door.

Orde turned away and walked up the street, his eyes so blinded by the greater glory that he all but ran down an inoffensive passerby. Then as the first effervescence died a more gloomy view of the situation came uppermost. To his heated imagination the deadlock seemed complete. Carroll's devotion to what she considered her duty appeared unbreakable. And then his fighting blood surged back to his heart. The fever of the argument coursed through his veins all that long night



"I will marry you whenever you say."

until daylight found him weary and fevered. By a tremendous effort he restrained himself from going over to Ninth street until the middle of the morning.

He entered the drawing room to find her seated at the piano. His heart

bounded. She did not look up until he stood almost at her shoulder. Then she turned and held out both her hands.

"It is no use, Jack," she said. "I care for you too much. I will marry you whenever you say."

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