

THE MASQUERADER

BY KATHERINE CECIL THURSTON

This famous novel is printed in serial form by arrangement with Richard Walton Tully, in whose screen version, a current First National Production adapted from John Hunter Booths dramatization, Guy Bates Post is now appearing

ELEVENTH INSTALLMENT

Chapter XX—Continued

"By-the-way," he said, quickly, "you wanted me for something?" The memory of her earlier suggestion came as a sudden boom.

She lifted her muffled again and smiled her roses thoughtfully. "Oh, it was nothing, really," she said. "You mercantile people give very shrewd suggestions sometimes, and I've been rather wanting a suggestion on an—adventure that I've had." She looked down at her flowers with a charmingly attentive air.

But Chilcote's restlessness had increased. Looking up, she suddenly caught the expression, and her own face changed.

"My dear Jack," she said, softly, "what a bore I am! Let's forget tedious things—and enjoy ourselves." She leaned towards him earnestly with an air of concern and reproach.

The action was not without effect. Her smiling voice, her smile, her slight, affectionate gesture, each carried weight. With a swift return of assurance he responded to her tone.

"Right?" he said. "Right? We will enjoy ourselves." He laughed quickly, and again with a conscious movement lifted his hand to his snuff.

"Then we'll postpone the advice?" Lillian laughed, too.

"Yes, Lillian. We'll postpone it." The word pleased him and he caught at it. "We won't bother about it now, but we won't shelve it altogether. We'll postpone it."

"Exactly," she settled herself more comfortably. "You'll dine with me one night—and we can talk it out then. I see so little of you nowadays," she added, in a lower voice.

"My dear girl, you're unfair!" Chilcote's spirits had risen; he spoke rapidly, almost pleasantly. "It isn't I who keep away—it's the stupid affairs of the world that keep me. I'd be with you every hour of the twelve if I had my way."

She looked up at the bare trees. Her expression was a delightful mixture of amusement, satisfaction, and scepticism. "Then you will dine?" she said at last.

"Certainly." His reaction to high spirits carried him forward.

"How nice! Shall we fix a day?"

"A day? Yes. Yes, you like." He hesitated for an instant, then again the impulse of the previous moment dominated his other feeling. "Yes," he said quickly. "Yes. After all, why not fix it now?" With a sudden inclination towards sensuality he opened his overcoat, thrust his hand into an inner pocket, and drew out his engagement-book—a small, narrow book lined with two pencils that Loder had scanned so intently on his first morning at Grosvenor Square. He opened it, turning the pages rapidly. "Friday day shall it be? Thursday's full and Friday—and Saturday. What a bore!" He still talked fast.

"Lillian leaned across. "What a sweet book!" she said. "But why the blue cross?" She touched one of the pages with her gloved finger.

Chilcote jerked the book, then laughed with a touch of embarrassment. "Oh, the crosses? Merely to remind me that certain appointments must be kept. You know my beastly memory! But what about the day? Shall we fix the day?" His voice was in control, but mentally her trivial question had disturbed and jarred him. "What day shall we say?" he repeated. "Monday in next week?"

Lillian glanced up with a faint exclamation of disappointment. "How horridly far away!" She spoke with engaging politeness, and, leaning forward, drew the book from Chilcote's hand. "What about tomorrow?" she exclaimed, turning back a page. "Why not tomorrow? I knew I saw a blank space."

"Tomorrow? Oh, I—I—" He stopped.

"Jack!" Her voice dropped. It was true that she desired Chilcote's opinion of her adventure, for Chilcote's opinion on men and manners had certain bitter shrewdness, but the exercise of her own power added a point to the desire. If the matter had ended with the gain or loss of a tea-party with him, it is probable that, whatever its utility, she would not have pressed it, but the underlying motive was the stronger. Chilcote had been a satellite for years, and it was unpleasant that any satellite should drop away into space.

"Jack!" she said again, in a lower and still more effective tone, and, lifting her muffle, she buried her face in her flowers. "I suppose I shall have to dine and go to a music-hall with Leonard—or stay at home by myself," she murmured, looking out across the trees.

Again Chilcote glanced over the long, tan-streaked ride. They had made the full circuit of the park.

"It's tiresome being by one's self," she murmured.

For a while he was irresponsive, then slowly his eyes returned to her face. He watched her for a second, and, leaning quickly towards her, he took his book and scribbled something in the vacant space.

She watched him interestedly; her face lit up, and she laid aside her muffle.

"Dear Jack!" she said. "How very sweet of you!" Then, as he held the book towards her, her face fell.

"Dine at Cadogan Gardens, 8 o'clock."

Talk with L., she read. "Why, you've forgotten the essential thing!" He looked up. "The essential thing?"

She smiled. "The blue cross," she said. "Isn't it worth even a little one?"

The tone was very soft. Chilcote yielded.

"You have the blue pencil," he said, to sudden response to her mood.

She glanced up in quiet pleasure at her success, and, with a charming affection of seriousness, marked the engagement with a big cross. At the same moment the car slatted speed, as the chauffeur waited for further orders.

Lillian shut the engagement book and handed it back. "Where can I drop you?" she asked. "At the club?"

The question recalled him to a sense of present things. He thrust the book into his pocket and glanced about him.

They had passed by Hyde Park corner. The crowd of horses and carriages had thinned as the hour of lunch drew near, and the wide road-way of the park had an air of added space. The suggested loneliness affected him. The tall trees, still bare of leaves, and the colossal gateway incomprehensibly stirred the sense of mental panic that sometimes seized him in face of vastness of space or of solitude. In one instant, Lillian, the engagement book had just made the number of its turning—all left him. The world was filled with his own personality, his own immediate inclinations.

"Don't bother about me!" he said, quickly. "I can get out here. You've been very good. It's been a delightful morning." With a hurried pressure of her fingers he rose and stepped from the car.

Reaching the ground, he paused for a moment and raised his hat; then, without a second glance, he turned and walked rapidly away.

Lillian sat watching him meditatively. She saw him pass through the gateway, saw him halt a moment; then she remembered the waiting chauffeur.

CHAPTER XXI

ON the same day that Chilcote had parted with Lillian—but at three o'clock in the afternoon—Loder, dressed in Chilcote's clothes and with Chilcote's heavy overcoat slung over his arm, walked from Fleet Street to Grosvenor Square. He walked steadily, neither slowly nor yet fast. The relation of his last journey over the same ground was tempered by fresh air, and he did not satisfactorily brush it away as himself. There was a loss of vehement elation and more of untroubled determination in his gait and bearing than there had been on that night, though the incidents of which they were the outcome were very complex.

On reaching Chilcote's house he passed upstairs; but, still following the routine of his previous return, he did not halt at Chilcote's door, but moved onward towards Eve's sitting room and there paused.

In that pause his numberless irregular thoughts fused into one.

He had the same undefined sense of standing upon sacred ground that had touched him on the previous occasion, but the outcome of the sensation was different. This time he raised his hand almost immediately and tapped on the door.

He waited, but no voice responded to his knock. With a sense of disappointment he knocked again; then, pressing his determination still further, he turned the handle and entered the room.

No private room is without meaning—whether trivial or the reverse. In a room, perhaps more even than in speech, in look, or in work, does the impress of the individual make itself felt. There, on the way of other things, the inner self impresses its seal—enforces its feeling claim to separate individuality. This thought, with its arresting interest, made Loder walk slowly, almost seriously, half-way across the room and then pause to study his surroundings.

The room was of medium size—not too large for comfort and not too small for ample space. At a first impression it struck him as unlike any anticipation of a woman's sanctum. The walls paneled in dark wood, the richly bound books, the beautifully designed bronze ornaments, even the flowers, deep crimson and violet blue in tone, had an air of sombre harmony that was scarcely feminine. With a strangely pleasant impression he realized this, and, following his habitual impulse, moved slowly forward towards the fireplace and there paused, his elbow resting on the mantelpiece.

He had scarcely settled comfortably into his position, scarcely entered on his second and more comprehensive study of the place, than the arrangement of his mind was altered by the turning of the handle and the opening of the door.

The new-comer was Eve herself. She was dressed in outdoor clothes, and walked into the room quickly, then, as Loder had done, she paused.

The gesture, so natural and so gracious, had a peculiar attraction, as she glanced up at him, her eyes alight with inquiry, she seemed to trace partly such the owner and designer of her surroundings. She was framed by them as naturally and

THE CHARACTERS IN THE STORY

JOHN CHILCOTE, member of the House of Commons, a party to a marriage of convenience and confirmed drug addict, changes places in life with

JOHN LODER, who is his exact counterpart in appearance. So successful is the deception that the masterful Loder becomes not only the strong political lieutenant of

FRAIDE, the great party leader, but is never suspected by the servants or by Chilcote's beautiful and unhappy wife,

EVE, who, however, is mystified by her husband's change in manner.

At a social function Loder is inveigled into a darkened tent, where

LADY LILLIAN ASTRUP, close associate of Chilcote, is indulging her hobby of crystal-gazing and makes him remove his rings, exposing the give-away scar on his finger. Realizing his danger, Loder induces

BLENKINGTON to tell her she had been deceived by the darkness in her first belief that Chilcote was the subject. The following morning his facts are substantiated by the interest he takes in the news of political developments in Persia, Russia having dispatched a large armed force to the aid of the insurrection against the Shah. Following a conference with

LILLIAN, editor of St. George's Gazette, he appears as spokesman for his party, delivering an address attacking the government for its lax policy. He is enjoying the thrill of his brilliant political triumph when he is recalled by Lillian, who renews his own life. Chilcote meets Lady Lillian and they go for a drive together in her motor car. She makes him quite uncomfortable by her references to "likenesses."



"My dear Jack," she said softly, "let's forget tedious things and enjoy ourselves." [Marcia Manon with Guy Bates Post in a scene from "The Masquerader"]

effectively in her eyes and her face were flushed to a pink tinge. For one moment he forgot that his presence demanded explanation; the next he had again explanation, and she had been reading at him intently, as she came forward slowly.

"John," she said, half in appeal, half in question.

He took a step towards her. "What a bore!" he said, quietly and involuntarily. In the sharp desire to establish himself in her regard he forgot that her eyes had never left his face.

He felt the incoherence of the words did not escape her. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I believe I know, except I don't know you." The quick ring of the words in her tone surprised him. But so had other thoughts more urgent than surprise.

In the five days of banishment just lived through, the need for a readjustment of his position with regard to her had come to him forcibly. The memory of the night when weakness and he had been at perilously close quarters had returned to him persistently and unconsciously, spoiling the remembrance of his triumph. It had been well enough to smother the thought of the weakness in days of power, but the knowing of it blotted out the weakness. Had it not rather thrown it into bolder relief? A room alone in his own strength does not bury his back upon a cushion; he does not quail in the solitary dark in the night hours spent in stamping the city streets, this had been the conviction that had recurred again and again, this the problem he, when, after much consideration, he had found a solution—satisfactory at first, but not so when Lillian called him to her. He would make a new departure. He would no longer yield to Eve; he would assert himself, and one alone filled his mind the persistence of Chilcote's political career. So does man satisfy himself by convincing himself against himself. He had this intention fully in mind as he came forward now.

"Well," he said slowly, "has it been very hard to have faith—these last five days?" It was not precisely the tone he had meant to adopt; but one must begin.

Eve turned at his words. Her eyes were beginning with life, her cheeks still touched to a deep, soft color by the freshness of the wintry air.

"No," she answered, with a shy, responsive touch of confidence. "I seemed to know you better. You had been so good to me, and I had been so good to you."

She glanced up at him, her eyes alight with inquiry, she seemed to trace partly such the owner and designer of her surroundings. She was framed by them as naturally and

the man's career ranks infinitely higher in her eyes than any personal desire for power.

For a moment their eyes met, then abruptly Loder looked away. She had gauged his intentions incorrectly, yet with disconcerting insight. Again the suggestion of an unusual personality below the serenity of her manner recurred to his imagination.

With an impulse altogether foreign to him he lifted his head and again met her glance. Then at last he spoke, but only two words. "Forgive me!" he said, with simple, direct sincerity.

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER his interview with Eve, Loder retired to the study and spent the remaining hours of the day and the whole span of the evening in work. At one o'clock, still feeling fresh in mind and body, he descended the stairs and passed into Chilcote's bedroom. The interview with Eve, though widely different from the one he had anticipated, had left him stimulated and alert. In the hours that followed it there had been an added anxiety to put his mind into harness, an added gratification in finding it answer to the rein.

A pleasant sense of retrospection settled upon him as he slowly undressed; and a pleasant sense of interest touched him, as, crossing to the dressing-table, he caught sight of Chilcote's engagement-book—taken with other things from the suit he had changed at dinner-time and carefully laid aside by Remwick.

He picked it up and slowly turned the pages. It always told the suggestion of a lottery—this diploma into another man's engagements, and drawing a prize or a blank. It was a sensation that even Loder had not dulled.

At first he turned the pages slowly, then by degrees his fingers quickened. Beyond the fact that this present evening was free, he knew nothing of his promised movements. The abruptness of Chilcote's arrival at Clifford's Inn in the afternoon had left no time for superfluous questions. He skimmed the writing with a touch of interested haste, then all at once he paused and smiled.

"Big enough for a tombstone!" he said below his breath as his eyes rested on a large blue cross. Then he smiled again and held the book to the light.

"Dine at 8, Cadogan Gardens, 8 o'clock. Talk with L., he read, still speaking softly to himself.

He stood for a moment pondering on the entry, then once more his glance reverted to the cross.

"Evidently meant to be seen," he mused; "but why the cross? Is it more explicit?" As he spoke, a look of comprehension suddenly crossed his face and the puzzled frown between his eyebrows cleared away.

With a feeling of satisfaction he remembered Laker's frequent and pressing suggestion that he should dine with him at Cadogan Gardens and discuss the political outlook.

Laker must have written during his absence, and Chilcote, having marked the engagement, felt no more responsibility. The invitation could scarcely have been verbal, as Chilcote, he knew, had lain very low in the five days of his return home.

So he argued, as he stood with the book still open in his hands, the blue cross staring imperatively from the white paper. And from the argument rose thoughts and suggestions that settled in his mind long after the lights had been switched off, long after the fire had died down and he had been left wrapped in darkness in the great cramped bed.

And so it came about that he took his second false step. Once during the press of the text morning's work he crossed his mind to verify his conclusions by a glance at the directory. But for once the wrong wish that he should have thought of his caution. His work was absorbing; the need of verification seemed very small. He let the suggestion pass.

At seven o'clock he dressed carefully. His mind was full of Laker and of the possibilities the night might hold; far more than once before, the weight of the St. George's Gazette, with Laker at its back, had turned the political scales. To be marked by him as a coming man was at any time a favorite portent; to be singled out by him at the present juncture was momentous. A thrill of expectancy, almost of excitement, passed through him as he surveyed his appearance preparatory to leaving the house.

Leaving down-stairs, he moved at once to the hall door; but almost as his hand touched it he halted, attracted by a movement on the land- ing above him. Turning, he saw Eve.

She was standing quite still, looking down upon the hall and looking once before, as she had done, she changed her position. "You are going out?" she asked. And it struck Loder quickly that there was a preparation, a shadow of discomposure in the tone of her voice. Moved by the impression, he responded with unusual promptness.

"Yes," he said. "The dinner at Cadogan Gardens."

"You are going out?" she asked again. "You are going out?" she asked again. "You are going out?" she asked again.

Again Loder made an interruption, but again she checked him.

"No," she said, still smiling. "You should never attempt such a task. Shall I tell you why?"

He stood silent, puzzled and interested.

"Because," she said, quickly, "when a woman really is interested,

I'm glad—very glad. It is quite—quite another step." She smiled with a warm, impulsive touch of sympathy.

Loder, looking up at her, felt his senses stir. At sound of her words his secret craving for success quickened to stronger life. The man whose sole incentive life within may go forward coldly and successfully; but the man who grasps a double temptation, who, even unconsciously, is impelled by another force, has a stronger impetus for attack, a surer, more vital hewing power. Still watching her, he answered instinctively:

"Yes," he said, slowly, "a long step." And, with a smile of farewell he turned, opened the door, and passed into the road.

The thrill of that one moment was still warm as he reached Cadogan Gardens and mounted the steps of No. 33—so vitally warm that he paused for an instant before pressing the electric bell. Then at last, dominated by anticipation, he turned and raised his hand.

The action was abrupt, and it was only as his fingers pressed the bell that a certain unexpectedness, a certain want of suitability in the aspect of the house, struck him. The door was white, the handle and knocker were of massive silver. The first seemed a disappointing index of Laker's private taste, the second a ridiculous temptation to needy humanness. He looked again at the number of the house, but it stared back at him convincingly. Then the door opened.

So keen was his sense of unfiness that, still trying to fuse his impression of Laker with the idea of silver door-knobs, he stepped into the hall without the usual preliminary question. Suddenly realizing the necessity, he turned to the servant; but the man forestalled him:

"Will you come to the white room, sir? And may I take your coat?"

The smooth certainty of the man's manner surprised him. It held an other savor of disappointment—seemingly as little in keeping with the keen, lustre-like Laker as did the house. Still struggling with his impression, he allowed himself to be relieved of his hat and coat and in silence skirted up the shallow staircase.

As the last step was reached it came to him again to mention his host's name; but simultaneously with the suggestion the servant stepped forward with a quick, silent movement and threw open a door.

"Mr. Chilcote," he announced, in a subdued, discreet voice.

Loder's first impression was of a room that seemed unusually luxurious, soft, and shadowed. Then all impression of inanimate things left him suddenly.

For the fraction of a second he stood in the doorway, while the room seemed emptied of everything, except a figure that rose slowly from a couch before the fire at sound of Chilcote's name; then, with a calmness that to himself seemed incredible, he moved forward into the room.

He might, of course, have beaten a retreat and obliterated many things; but life is full of might-have-beens, and retreat never presents itself agreeably to a strong man. His impulse was to face the difficulty, and he acted on the impulse.

Lillian had risen slowly; and as he neared her she held out her hand. "Jack!" she exclaimed, softly. "How sweet of you to remember!"

The voice and words came to him with great distinctness, and as they came one uncertainty passed forever from his mind—the question as to what relation she and Chilcote held to each other. With the realization came the thought of Eve, and in the midst of his own difficulty his face hardened.

Lillian ignored the coldness. Taking his hand, she smiled. "You're unusually punctual," she said. "But your hands are cold. Come closer to the fire."

Loder was not sensible that his hands were cold, but he suffered himself to be drawn forward.

One end of the couch was in fire-light, the other in shadow. By a fortunate arrangement of chance Lillian selected the brighter end for herself and offered the other to her guest. With a quick sense of respect he accepted it. At least he could sit secure from detection while he tempered with fate.

For a moment they sat silent, then Lillian stirred. "Won't you smoke?" she asked.

Everything in the room seemed soft and enervating—the subdued glow of the fire, the smell of roses that hung about the air, and, last of all, Lillian's slow, soothing voice. With a sense of oppression he stiffened his shoulders and sat straighter in his place.

"No," he said, "I don't think I shall smoke."

She moved nearer to him. "Dear Jack," she said, pleadingly, "don't say you're in a bad mood. Don't say you want to postpone again." She looked up at him and laughed a little in mock desperation.

Loder was at a loss.

Another silence followed, then she frowned and rose from the couch. Like many restless people, she possessed a touch of obstinacy; and now that she was caught over Chilcote was determined that she had violated her right to command him, her original purpose came uppermost again. And at last, interested, in-

different or attentive, she intended to make use of him.

She moved to the fire and stood looking down into it.

"Jack," she began gently, "a really amazing thing has happened to me. I do so want you to throw some light."

Loder said nothing.

There was a fresh pause while she softly smoothed the silk embroidery that edged her gown. Then once more she looked up at him.

"Did I ever tell you," she began, "that I was once in a railway accident on a funny little Italian railway, centuries before I met you?" she laughed softly; and with a pretty air of confidence turned from the fire and resumed her seat.

"Astrup had caught a fever in Florence, and I was rushing away for fear of the infection, when our stupid little train ran off the rails near Platora and smashed itself up. Fortunately we were within half a mile of a village, so we weren't quite bereft. The village was impossibly like a toy village, and the accommodation what one would expect in a Noah's Ark, but it was all absolutely picturesque. I put up at the little inn with my maid and Ko Ko. Ko Ko was such a sweet, dog-like white poodle, he was tremendously keen on poodles that year." She stopped and looked thoughtfully towards the fire.

"But to come to the point of the story, Jack, the toy village had a boy doll." She laughed again. "He was an Englishman—and the first person to come to my rescue on the night of the smashup. He was staying at the Noah's Ark Inn; and after that first night I—he—we—Oh, Jack, haven't you any imagination?" Her voice sounded plaintive and sharp. The man who is indifferent to the recital of an old love affair implies the worst kind of flattery. "I believe you aren't interested," she added, in another and more reproachful tone.

"He looked forward. 'You're wrong there,' he said, slowly. 'I'm deeply interested.'"

She glanced at him again. His tone reassured her, but his words left her uncertain; Chilcote was rarely emphatic. With a touch of hesitation she went on with her tale:

"As I told you, he was the first to find me. I should say, for my stupid mind was having hysterics further up the line, and Ko Ko was lost. I remember the first thing I did was to send him in search of Ko Ko."

Narrating his position, Loder found himself in a predicament. "Did he succeed?" he said, dryly.

"Succeeded? Oh, yes, he succeeded." She smiled involuntarily. "Poor Ko Ko was stowed away under the luggage-van; and after quite a lot of trouble he pulled him out. When it was all done the dog was quite unhurt and livelier than ever, but the Englishman had his finger almost bitten through. Ko Ko was a dear, but his teeth and his temper were both very sharp." She laughed once more in soft amusement.

Loder was silent for a second, then he too laughed—Chilcote's short, caustic laugh. "And you tied up the wound, I suppose?"

She glanced up, half displeased. "We were both staving at the side inn," she said, as though no further explanation could be needed. Then again her manner changed. She moved imperceptibly nearer and touched his right hand. His left, which was farther away from her, was well in the shadow of the cushions.

"Jack," she said, caressingly, "I can't tell you this stupid old story that I've brought you here; it's really to tell you a sort of sequel." She stroked his hand gently once or twice. "As I say, I met this man and we—we had an affair. You understand? Then we quarrelled—quarrelled quite badly—and I came away. He remembered him rather longer than I remember most people—he was one of those dogged individuals who stick in one's mind. But he has stayed in mine for another reason—"

Again she looked up. "He has stayed because you helped to keep him there. You know how I have sometimes put my hands over your mouth and told you that your eyes reminded me of some one else? Well, that some one else was my Englishman. But you mustn't be jealous, he was a horrid, obstinate person, and you—well, you know what I think of you—" She pressed his hand. "But to come to the end of the story, I never saw this man since that long-ago time, until—the night of Blanche's party!" She spoke slowly, to give full effect to her worst people; then she waited for his surprise.

But the result was not what she expected. He said nothing; and, with an abrupt movement, he drew his hand from between hers.

"Aren't you surprised?" she asked at last, with a delicate hint of reproach.

He started slightly, as if recalled to the necessity of the moment. "Surprised?" he said. "Why should I be surprised? One person more or less at a big party isn't astonishing. Besides, you expect a man to turn up sooner or later in 'the old times.' Why should I be surprised?"

She lay back, her eyes closed, her face pale. "It's a mystery," she said, "it's a mystery. I've been fascinated ever since that night in a village."

"What do you think of it now?"