

THE Masquerader

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CHAPTER X (Continued).

"It seemed to begin that night I dined with the Fraides," she went on. "Mr. Fraide talked so wisely and so kindly about so many things. He recalled all we had hoped for in you, and—and he blamed me a little." She paused and laid her cup aside. "He said that when people have made what they call their last effort they should always make just one effort more. He promised that if I could once persuade you to take an interest in your work he would do the rest. He said all that and a thousand other kinder things, and I sat and listened. But all the time I thought of nothing but their uselessness. Before I left I promised to do my best, but my thought was still the same. It was stronger than ever when I forced myself to come up here." She paused again and glanced at Loder's averted head. "But I came, and then, as if by conquering myself I had compelled a reward, you seemed, you somehow seemed different. It sounds ridiculous, I know." Her voice was half amused, half deprecating. "It wasn't a difference in your face, though I knew directly that you were free from nerves." Again she hesitated over the word. "It was a difference in yourself, in the things you said, more than in the way you said them." Once more she paused and laughed a little.

Loder's discomfort grew. "But it didn't affect me then," she spoke more slowly. "I wouldn't admit it then. And the next day when we talked on the terrace I still refused to admit it, though I felt it more strongly than before. But I have watched you since that day, and I know there is a change. Mr. Fraide feels the same, and he is never mistaken. I know it's only nine or ten days, but I've hardly seen you in the same mood for nine or ten hours in the last three years." She stopped, and the silence was impressive. It seemed to plead for confirmation of her instinct.

Still Loder could find no response. After waiting for a moment she leaned forward in her chair and looked up at him.

"John," she said, "is it going to last? That's what I came to ask. I don't want to believe till I'm sure. I don't want to risk a new disappointment." Loder felt the earnestness of her gaze, though he avoided meeting it.

"I couldn't have said this to you a week ago, but today I can. I don't pretend to explain why. The feeling is too inexplicable. I only know that I can say it now and that I couldn't a week ago. Will you understand—and answer?"

Still Loder remained mute. His position was horribly incongruous. What could he say? What dared he say?

Confused by his silence, Eve rose. "If it's only a phase, don't try to hide it," she said. "But if it's going to last—if by any possibility it's going to last"—She hesitated and looked up.

She was quite close to him. He would have been less than man had he been unconscious of the subtle contact of her glance, the nearness of her presence, and no one had ever hinted that manhood was lacking in him. It was a moment of temptation. His own energy, his own intentions, seemed so near, Chilcote and Chilcote's claims so distant and unreal. After all, his life, his ambitions, his determinations, were his own. He lifted his eyes and looked at her.

"You want me to tell you that I will go on?" he said.

Her eyes brightened. She took a step forward. "Yes," she said; "I want more than anything in the world."

There was a wait. The declaration that would satisfy her came to Loder's lips, but he delayed it. The delay was fateful. While he stood silent the door opened, and the servant who had brought in the tea reappeared.

He crossed the room and handed Loder a telegram. "Any answer, sir?" he said.

Eve moved back to her chair. There was a flush on her cheeks, and her eyes were still alertly bright.

Loder tore the telegram open, read it, then threw it into the fire.

"No answer," he said laconically. At the brusqueness of his voice Eve looked up. "Disagreeable news?" she said as the servant departed.

He didn't look at her. He was watching the telegram withering in the center of the fire.

"No," he said at last in a strained voice. "No; only news that I—that I had forgotten to expect."

CHAPTER XI.

THERE was a silence, an uneasy break, after Loder spoke. The episode of the telegram was, to all appearances, ordinary enough, calling forth Eve's question and his own reply as a natural sequence, yet in the pause that followed it each was conscious of a jar, each was aware that in some subtle way the thread of sympathy had been dropped, though to one the cause was inexplicable and to the other only too plain.

Loder watched the ghost of his message grow whiter and thinner, then dissolve into airy fragments and gutter

up the chimney. As the last morsel wavered out of sight he turned and looked at his companion.

"You almost made me commit myself," he said. In the desire to hide his feelings his tone was short.

Eve returned his glance with a quiet regard, but he scarcely saw it. He had a stupefied sense of disaster, a feeling of bitter self commiseration that for the moment outweighed all other considerations. Almost at the moment of justification the good of life had crumbled in his fingers, the soil given beneath his feet, and with an absence of logic, a lack of justice unusual in him, he let resentment against Chilcote sweep suddenly over his mind.

Eve, still watching him, saw the darkening of his expression and with a quiet movement rose from her chair.

"Lady Sarah has a theater party to-night, and I am dining with her," she said. "It is an early dinner, so I must think about dressing. I'm sorry you think I tried to draw you into anything. I must have explained myself badly." She laughed a little to cover the slight discomfiture that her tone betrayed, and as she laughed she moved across the room toward the door.

Loder, engrossed in the check to his own schemes, incensed at the suddenness of Chilcote's recall and still more incensed at his own folly in not having anticipated it, was oblivious for the moment of both her movement and her words. Then quite abruptly she intruded herself upon him, breaking through his egotism with something of the sharpness of pain following a blow. Turning quickly from the fireplace, he faced the shadowy room across which she had passed, but simultaneously with his turning she gained the door.

The knowledge that she was gone struck him with a sense of double loss. "Wait!" he called, suddenly moving forward. But almost at once he paused, chilled by the solitude of the room.

"Eve!" he said, using her name unconsciously for the first time.

But the corridor, as well as the room, was empty; he was too late. He stood irresolute; then he laughed shortly, turned and passed back toward the fireplace.

The blow had fallen, the inevitable came to pass, and nothing remained but to take the fact with as good a grace as possible. Chilcote's telegram had summoned him to Clifford's inn at 7 o'clock, and it was now well on toward 6. He pulled out his watch—Chilcote's watch, he realized with a touch of grim humor as he stooped to examine the dial by the light of the fire—then, as if the humor had verged to another feeling, he stood straight again and felt for the electric button in the wall. His fingers touched it, and simultaneously the room was lighted.

The abrupt alteration from shadow to light came almost as a shock. The feminine arrangement of the tea table seemed incongruous beside the sober books and the desk laden with papers—incongruous as his own presence in the place. The thought was unpleasant, and he turned aside as if to avoid it, but at the movement his eyes fell on Chilcote's cigarette box with its gleaming monogram, and the whimsical suggestion of his first morning rose again. The idea that the inanimate objects in the room knew him for what he was, recognized the interloper where human eyes saw the rightful possessor, returned to his mind. Through all his disgust and chagrin a smile forced itself to his lips, and, crossing the room for the second time, he passed into Chilcote's bedroom.

There the massive furniture and somber atmosphere fitted better with his mood than the energy and action which the study always suggested. Walking directly to the great bed, he sat on its side and for several minutes stared straight in front of him, apparently seeing nothing; then at last he apathetically passed from him, as his previous anger against Chilcote had passed. He stood up slowly, drawing his long limbs together, and recrossed the room, passing along the corridor and through the door communicating with the rest of the house. Five minutes later he was in the open air and walking steadily eastward, his hat drawn forward and his overcoat buttoned up.

As he traversed the streets he allowed himself no thought. Once, as he waited in Trafalgar square to find a passage between the vehicles, the remembrance of Chilcote's voice coming out of the fog on their first night made itself prominent, but he rejected it quickly, guarding himself from even an involuntary glance at the place of their meeting. The Strand, with its unceasing life, came to him as something almost unfamiliar. Since his identification with the new life no business had drawn him east of Charing Cross, and his first sight of the narrower stream of traffic struck him as garish and unpleasant. As the impression came he accelerated his steps, moved by the wish to make regret and retrospection alike impossible by a contact with actual forces.

Still walking hastily, he entered Clifford's inn, but there almost unconsciously his feet halted. There was

something in the quiet immobility of the place that sobered energy, both mental and physical; a sense of changelessness—the changelessness of inanimate things, that rises in such solemn contrast to the variability of mere human nature, which a new environment, a new outlook, sometimes even a new presence, has power to upheave and remold. He paused, then with slower and steadier steps crossed the little court and mounted the familiar stairs of his own house.

As he turned the handle of his own door some one stirred inside the sitting room. Still under the influence of the stones and trees that he had just left, he moved directly toward the sound and, without waiting for permission, entered the room. After the darkness of the passage it seemed well lighted, for, besides the lamp with its green shade, a large fire burned in the grate and helped to dispel the shadows.

As he entered the room Chilcote rose and came forward, his figure thrown into strong relief by the double light. He was dressed in a shabby tweed suit; his face looked pale and set with a slightly nervous tension. But, besides the look and a certain added restlessness of glance, there was no visible change. Reaching Loder, he held out his hand.

"Well?" he said quickly.

The other looked at him questioningly.

"Well? Well? How has it gone?"

"The scheme? Oh, excellently!" Loder's manner was abrupt. Turning from the restless curiosity in Chilcote's eyes, he moved a little way across the room and began to draw off his coat. Then, as if struck by the ineffectuality of the action, he looked back again. "The scheme has gone extraordinarily," he said. "I could almost say absurdly. There are some things, Chilcote, that fairly bowl a man over."

A great relief tinged Chilcote's face. "Good!" he exclaimed. "Tell me all about it."

But Loder was reticent. The moment was not propitious. It was as if a hungry man had dreamed a great banquet and had awakened to his starvation. He was chary of imparting his visions.

"There's nothing to tell," he said shortly. "All that you'll want to know is here in black and white. I don't think you'll find I have slipped anything. It's a clear business record." From an inner pocket he drew out a bulky notebook and, recrossing the room, laid it open on the table. It was a correct, even a minute, record of every action that had been accomplished in Chilcote's name. "I don't think you'll find any loose ends," he said as he turned back the pages. "I had you and your position in my mind all through." He paused and glanced up from the book. "You have a position that absolutely insists upon attention," he added in a different voice.

At the new tone Chilcote looked up as well. "No moral lectures!" he said, with a nervous laugh. "I was anxious to know if you had pulled it off—and you have reassured me. That's enough. I was in a funk this afternoon to know how things were going—one of those sudden, unreasonable funks. But now that I see you've cut himself short and laughed once more—now that I see you, I'm hanged if I don't want to prolong your engagement."

Loder glanced at him, then glanced away. He felt a quick shame at the eagerness that rose at the words—a surprised contempt at his own readiness to anticipate the man's weakness. But almost as speedily as he had turned away he looked back again.

"Tush, man!" he said, with his old intolerant manner. "You're dreaming. You've had your holiday, and school's begun again. You must remember you are dining with the Charringtons to-night. Young Charrington's coming of age—quite a big business. Come along, I want my clothes." He laughed and, moving closer to Chilcote, slapped him on the shoulder.

Chilcote started; then, suddenly becoming imbued with the other's manner, he echoed the laugh.

"By Jove," he said, "you're right! You're quite right. A man must keep his feet in their own groove." Raising his hand, he began to fumble with his tie.

But Loder kept the same position. "You'll find the check book in its usual drawer," he said. "I've made one entry of £100, pay for the first week. The rest can stand over until—" He paused abruptly.

Chilcote shifted his position. "Don't talk about that. It upsets me to anticipate. I can make out a check to-morrow payable to John Loder."

"No. That can wait. The name of Loder is better out of the book. We can't be too careful." Loder spoke with unusual impetuosity. Already a slight, unreasonable jealousy was coloring his thoughts. Already he grudged the idea of Chilcote's using his unstable glance and restless fingers opening the drawers and sorting the papers that for one stupendous fortnight had been his without question. Turning aside, he changed the subject brusquely.

"Come into the bedroom," he said. "It's half past 7 if it's a minute, and the Charringtons' show is at 8." Without waiting for a reply, he walked across the room and held the door open.

There was no silence while they exchanged clothes. Loder talked continuously, sometimes in short, curt sentences, sometimes with ironic touches

of humor; he talked until Chilcote, strangely affected by contact with another personality after his weeks of solitude, fell under his influence, his excitement rising, his imagination stirring at the novelty of change. At last, garbed once more in the clothes of his own world, he passed from the bedroom back into the sitting room and there halted, waiting for his companion.

Almost directly Loder followed. He came into the room quietly and, moving at once to the table, picked up the notebook.

"I'm not going to preach," he began, "so you needn't shut me up. But I'll say just one thing—a thing that will get said. Try to keep your hold! Remember your responsibilities and keep your hold!" He spoke energetically, looking earnestly into Chilcote's eyes. He did not realize it, but he was pleading for his own career.

Chilcote paled a little, as he always did in face of a reality. Then he extended his hand.

"My dear fellow," he said, with a touch of hauteur, "a man can generally be trusted to look after his own life."

Extricating his hand almost immediately, he turned toward the door and without a word of farewell passed into the little hall, leaving Loder alone in the sitting room.

CHAPTER XII.

ON the night of Chilcote's return to his own Loder tasted the lees of life poignantly for the first time. Before their curious compact had been entered upon he had been, if not content, at least apathetic; but with action the apathy had been dispersed, never again to regain its old position.

He realized with bitter certainty that this was no real home coming. On entering Chilcote's house he had experienced none of the unfamiliarity, none of the unsettled awkwardness, that assailed him now. There he had almost seemed the exile returning after many hardships; here, in the atmosphere made common by years, he felt an alien. It was illustrative of the man's character that sentimentalities found no place in his nature. Sentiments were not lacking, though they lay out of sight, but sentimentalities he altogether deeded.

Left alone in the sitting room after Chilcote's departure, his first sensation was one of physical discomfort and unfamiliarity. His own clothes, with their worn looseness, brought no sense of friendliness such as some men find in an old garment. Lounging and the clothes that suggested lounging had no appeal for him. In his eyes the garb that implies responsibility was symbolic and even inspiring.

And as with clothes so with his actual surroundings. Each detail of his room was familiar, but not one had



ever become intimately close. He had used the place for years, but he had used it as he might use a hotel, and whatever of his household gods had come with him remained, like himself, on sufferance. His entrance into Chilcote's surroundings had been altogether different. Unknown to himself, he had been in the position of a young artist who, having roughly modeled in clay, is brought into the studio of a sculptor. To his outward vision everything is new, but his inner sight leaps to instant understanding. Amid all the strangeness he recognizes the one essential—the workshop, the atmosphere, the home.

On this first night of return Loder comprehended something of his position, and, comprehending, he faced the problem and fought with it. He had made his bargain and must pay his share. Weighing this, he had looked about his room with a quiet gaze. Then at last, as if finding the object really sought for, his eyes had come round to the mantelpiece and rested on the pipe rack. The pipes stood precisely as he had left them. He had looked at them for a long time, then an ironic expression that was almost a smile had touched his lips, and, crossing the room, he had taken the oldest and blackest from its place and slowly filled it with tobacco.

With the first indrawn breath of smoke his attitude had unbecomingly changed. He had chosen the one factor capable of easing his mood. A cigarette is, for the trivial moments of life, a cigar for its fulfillments, its pleasant, comfortable retrospections; but in real distress—in the solving of question, the fighting of difficulty—a pipe is man's eternal solace.

So he had passed the first night of his return to the actualities of life. Next day his mind was somewhat settled, and outwardly was not so essential; but, though facts faced him more solidly, they were nevertheless more drab in shade. The necessity for work, that blessed antidote to ennui, no longer forced him to endeavor. He was no longer penniless, but the money he possessed brought with it no desires. When a man has lived from hand to mouth for years and suddenly

finds himself with £100 in his pocket the result is sometimes curious. He finds with a vague sense of surprise that he has forgotten how to spend. That extravagance, like other artificial passions, requires cultivation.

This he realized even more fully on the days that followed the night of his first return, and with it was born a new bitterness. The man who has friends and no money may find life difficult, but the man who has money and no friend to rejoice in his fortune or benefit by his generosity is almost indeed. With the heaven of incredulity that works in all strong natures, Loder distrusted the professional beggar; therefore the charity that bestows easily and promiscuously was denied him, and of other channels of generosity he was too self contained to have learned the secret.

When depression falls upon a man of usually even temperament it descends with a double weight. The mercurial nature has a hundred counterbalancing devices to rid itself of gloom—a sudden lifting of spirit, a memory of other moods lived through, other blacknesses dispersed by time, but the man of level nature has none of these. Depression when it comes is indeed depression; no phase of mind to be superseded by another phase, but a slackening of all the chords of life.

It was through such a depression as this that he labored during those weeks, while no summons and no hint of remembrance came from Chilcote. His position was peculiarly difficult. He found no action in the present, and toward the future he dared not trust himself to look. He had slipped the old moorings that familiarity had rendered enduring, but, having slipped them, he had found no substitute. Such was his case on the last night of the three weeks and such his frame of mind as he crossed Fleet street from Clifford's Inn to Middle Temple Lane.

It was scarcely 7 o'clock, but already the dusk was falling. The greater press of vehicles had ceased, and the light of the street lamps gleamed back from the spaces of dry and polished roadway, worn smooth as a mirror by wheels and hoofs. Something of the solitude of night that sits so ill on the strenuous city street was making itself felt, though the throngs of people on the pathway still streamed eastward and westward, and the taverns made a busy trade.

Having crossed the roadway, Loder paused for a moment to survey the scene. But humanity in the abstract made small appeal to him, and his glance wandered from the passersby to the buildings massed like clouds against the dark sky. As his gaze moved slowly from one to the other a clock near at hand struck 7, and an instant later the chorus was taken up by a dozen clamorous tongues. Usually he scarcely heard and never heeded these innumerable chimes, but this evening their effect was strange. Coming out of the darkness, they seemed to possess a personal note, a human declaration. The impression was fantastic, but it was strong. With a species of revolt against life and his own personality, he turned slowly and moved forward in the direction of Ludgate Hill.

For a space he continued his course, then, reaching Bowyer street, he turned sharply to the right and made his way down the slight incline that leads to the embankment. There he paused and drew a long breath. The sense of space and darkness soothed him. Pulling his cap over his eyes, he crossed to the river and walked on in the direction of Westminster bridge.

As he walked the great mass of water by his side looked dense and smooth as oil with its sweeping width and network of reflected light. On its farther bank rose the tall buildings, the chimneys, the flaring lights that suggest another and an alien London. Close at hand stretched the solid stone parapet, giving assurance of protection.

All these things he saw with his mental eyes, but with his mental eyes only, for his physical gaze was fixed ahead where the houses of parliament loomed out of the dusk. From the great buildings his eyes never wavered until the embankment was traversed and Westminster bridge reached. Then he paused, resting his arms on the coping of the bridge.

In the tense quietude of the darkness the place looked vast and inspiring. The shadowy terrace, the silent river, the rows of lighted windows, each was significant. Slowly and comprehensively his glance passed from one to the other. He was no sentimentalist and no dreamer. His act was simply the act of a man whose interests, robbed of their natural outlet, turn instinctively toward the forms and symbols of the work that is done by them. His scrutiny was steady—even cold. He was raised to no exaltation by the vastness of the building, nor was he chilled by any dwarfing of himself. He looked at it long and thoughtfully; then, again moving slowly, he turned and retraced his steps.

His mind was full as he walked back, still oblivious of the stone parapet of the embankment, the bare trees and the flaring lights of the advertisements across the water. Turning to the left, he regained Fleet street and made for his own habitation with the quiet accuracy that some men exhibit in moments of absorption.

He crossed Clifford's Inn with the same slow, almost listless, step; then, as his own doorway came into view, he stopped. Some one was standing in its recess.

For a moment he wondered if his fancy were playing him a trick. Then his reason sprang to certainty with so fierce a leap that for an instant his mind recoiled. For we more often stand agast at the strength of our own feelings than before the enormity of our neighbor's actions.

"Is that you, Chilcote?" he said below

his breath. At the sound of his voice the other wheeled round. "Hello!" he said. "I thought you were the ghost of some old inhabitant. I suppose I am very unexpected."

Loder took the hand that he extended and pressed the fingers unconsciously. The sight of this man was like the finding of an oasis at the point where the desert is sandiest, deadliest, most unbearable.

"Yes, you are—unexpected," he answered.

Chilcote looked at him, then looked out into the court. "I'm done up," he said. "I'm right at the end of the tether." He laughed as he said it, but in the dim light of the hall Loder thought his face looked ill and harassed despite the flush that the excitement of the meeting had brought to it. Taking his arm, he drew him toward the stairs.

"So the rope has run out, eh?" he said, in imitation of the other's tone. But under the quiet of his manner his own nerves were throbbing with the peculiar alertness of anticipation, a sudden sense of mastery over life that lifted him above surroundings and above persons—a sense of stature, mental and physical, from which he surveyed the world. He felt as if fate in the moment of utter darkness had given him a sign.

As they crossed the hall Chilcote had drawn away and was already mounting the stairs. And as Loder followed it came sharply to his mind that here, in the slipshod freedom of a door that was always open and stairs that were innocent of covering, lay his companion's real niche—unrecognized in outward avowal, but acknowledged by the inward, keener sense that manifests the individual.

In silence they mounted the stairs, but on the first landing Chilcote paused and looked back, surveying Loder from the superior height of two steps.

"I did very well at first," he said. "I did very well. I almost followed your example for a week or so. I found myself on a sort of pinnacle, and I clung on. But in the last ten days I've—I've rather lapsed."

"Why?" Loder avoided looking at his face. He kept his eyes fixed determinedly on the spot where his own hand gripped the banister.

"Why?" Chilcote repeated. "Oh, the prehistoric tale—weakness stronger than strength. I'm—I'm sorry to come down on you like this, but it's the social side that bowls me over. It's the social side I can't stick."

"The social side? But I thought—" "Don't think. I never think; it entails such a constant upsetting of principles and theories. We did arrange for business only, but one can't set up barriers. Society pushes itself everywhere nowadays, into business most of all. I don't want you for theater parties or dinners. But a big reception with a political flavor is different. A man has to be seen at these things. He needn't say anything or do anything, but it's bad form if he fails to show up."

Loder raised his head. "You must explain," he said abruptly.

Chilcote started slightly at the sudden demand.

"I—I suppose I'm rather irrelevant," he said quickly. "Fact is, there's a reception at the Bramfells' tonight. You know Blanche Bramfell—Viscountess Bramfell, sister to Lillian Astrupp." His words conveyed nothing to Loder, but he did not consider that. All explanations were irksome to him and he invariably chafed to be done with them.

"And you've got to put in an appearance—for party reasons?" Loder broke in.

Chilcote showed relief. "Yes. Old Fraide makes rather a point of it—so does Eve." He said the last words carelessly; then, as if their sound recalled something, his expression changed. A touch of satiric amusement touched his lips and he laughed.

"By the way, Loder," he said, "my wife was actually tolerant of me for nine or ten days after my return. I thought your representation was to be quite impersonal? I'm not jealous," he laughed. "I'm not jealous, I assure you, but the burned child shouldn't grow absentminded."

At his tone and his laugh Loder's blood stirred. With a sudden, unexpected impulse his hand tightened on the banister, and, looking up, he caught sight of the face above him—his own face it seemed, alighted with malicious interest. At the sight a strange sensation seized him, his grip on the banister loosened, and, pushing past Chilcote, he hurriedly mounted the stairs.

Outside his own door the other overtook him.

"Loder!" he said. "Loder! I meant no harm. A man must have a laugh sometimes."

But Loder was facing the door and did not turn round.

A sudden fear shook Chilcote. "Loder!" he exclaimed again. "You would not desert me? I can't go back to-night. I can't go back."

Still Loder remained immovable. Alarmed by his silence, Chilcote stepped closer to him.

"Loder! Loder, you won't desert me?" He caught hastily at his arm.

With a quick repulsion Loder shook him off, then almost as quickly he turned round.

"What fools we all are!" he said abruptly. "We only differ in degree. Come in and let us change our clothes."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE best moments of a man's life are the moments when, strong in himself, he feels that the world lies before him. Gratiated ambition may be the summer, but anticipation is the ardent springtime of a man's career.

As Loder drove that night from Fleet street to Grosvenor square he realized this, though scarcely with any degree

of consciousness, for he was no accomplished self analyst. But in a way, feeling too vigorous to be denied, he recognized his regained foothold—a step that lifted him at once from a pit to the pinnacle.

In that moment of realization he looked neither backward nor forward. The present was all sufficing. Difficulties might loom ahead, but difficulties had but one object—the testing and sharpening of a man's strength. In the first deep surge of egotistical feeling he most rejoiced in Chilcote's weakness. The more Chilcote tangled the threads of his life the stronger must be the fingers that unraveled them. He was possessed by a great impatience. The joy of action was stirring in his blood.

Leaving the cab, he walked confidently to the door of Chilcote's house and inserted the latchkey. Even in the small act there was a grain of individual satisfaction. Then very quietly he opened the door and crossed the hall.

As he entered, a footman was arranging the fire that burned in the grate. Seeing the man, he halted.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked in unconscious repetition of his first question in the same house.

The man looked up. "She has just finished dinner, sir. She dined alone in her own room." He glanced at Loder in the quick, uncertain way that was noticeable in all the servants of the household when they addressed the master. Loder saw the look and wondered what depth of curiosity it betrayed, how much of insight into the domestic life that he must always be content to skim. For an instant the resentment against Chilcote tinged his exaltation, but he swept it angrily aside. Without further remark he began to mount the stairs.

Gaining the landing, he did not turn as usual to the door that shut off Chilcote's rooms, but moved onward down the corridor toward Eve's private sitting room. He moved slowly till the door was reached. Then he paused and lifted his hand. There was a moment's wait while his fingers rested on the handle; then a sensation he could not explain, a reticence, a reluctance to intrude upon this one precinct, caused his fingers to relax. With a slight embarrassed gesture he drew back slowly and retraced his steps.

Once in Chilcote's bedroom, he walked to the nearest bell and pressed it. Renwick responded, and at sight of him Loder's feelings warmed with the same sense of fitness and familiarity that the great bed and somber furniture of the room had inspired.

But the man did not come forward as he had expected. He remained close to the door with a hesitation that was unusual in a trained servant. It struck Loder that possibly his stolidity had incensed Chilcote and that possibly Chilcote had been at no pains to conceal the exasperation. The idea caused him to smile involuntarily.

"Come into the room, Renwick," he said. "It's uncomfortable to see you standing there. I want to know if Mr. Chilcote has sent me any message about tonight."

Renwick studied him furtively as he came forward. "Yes, sir," he said. "Mrs. Chilcote's maid said that the carriage was ordered for 10:15, and she hoped that would suit you." He spoke reluctantly, as if expecting a rebuke.

At the opening sentence Loder turned aside, but now, as the man finished, he wheeled round again and looked at him closely with his keen observant eyes.

"Look here," he said. "I can't have you speak to me like that. I may come down on you rather sharply when my nerves are bad, but when I'm myself I treat you—well, I treat you decently at any rate. You'll have to learn to discriminate. Look at me now! The thrill of risk and of rulership passes through him as he spoke. 'Look at me now! Do I look as I looked this morning—or yesterday?'"

The man eyed him half stupidly, half timidly.

"Well?" Loder insisted.

"Well, sir," Renwick responded, with some slowness, "you look the same as you look different—a healthier color, perhaps, sir, and the eye clearer." He grew more confident under Loder's half humorous, half insistent gaze.

"Now that I look closer, sir—" Loder laughed. "That's it!" he said.

"Now that you look closer, you'll begin to grow observant. Observation is an excellent quality in a servant. When you come into a room in future, be first of all to me and take you from that. Remember that serving a man with nerves is like serving a master. Now you can go, and Mrs. Chilcote's maid that I shall be quite ready at a quarter past 10."

"Yes, sir. And after that?"

Continued next week.

Charles F. Thornton, of Cottage Grove, has sued his wife, Alice Thornton, for a divorce, alleging desertion.

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