



Two Women and Tony

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HERE was a refined air about every detail of Mrs. Trevelyan, from the way she held her head to the way she chose her shoes. She was small and ridiculously young to be the mother of such a robust, muscular specimen of humanity as Tony.

"Isn't it awful," she was saying in a voice that was suggestive of tears.

Tony's father looked at the offending picture post card and nodded, but there had been a time in his young days when the photograph of a pretty actress would certainly not have stirred him to anger, so he refrained from comment. All the same, the situation was awkward for Tony was very young. The sting was in the message written at the side of the picture—a picture in which clothes were the least conspicuous feature.

"We are playing for one night at your town. Train arrives at 11.30 on Saturday morning. Meet me, and we'll have a giddy time.—MIRIAM."

In bold type there was printed at the foot: "Miriam Fortescue as 'Mme. Fluffy,' in 'The Parisienne.'"

"Now I come to think of it," commented Mrs. Trevelyan, "Tony has always been first to take in the letters every morning lately. This, I suppose is the explanation."

"Evidently," responded her husband, puckering his brows. "The—the person presumably arrives this morning."

Mrs. Trevelyan felt the premonitory symptoms of a shudder coming on, but she braced herself against any tendency toward displaying emotion. Neither shuddering nor tears would avert her son's impending doom. This was an occasion for thinking and acting quickly. What could she do? It was an impossible position. In a couple of hours Tony would be at the station, perhaps—nay, probably, kissing the be-powdered, be-routed play-actress, an actress, too, who had posed before a photographer in such a costume.

"I'll go down and see the train in if you like," suggested Mr. Trevelyan. "He would be sure to see me and keep out of the way."

"That would be merely a temporary measure," replied his wife. "I am puzzling my brain to find a cure for the boy."

Suddenly a startled expression flashed over her face as though an idea had come to her, but one upon which she hesitated to act.

"Suppose I go to the station?" she said slowly.

"What difference would that make?"

"My dear husband, I have it exactly," Mrs. Trevelyan declared. "I have to inform you that Miss Fluffy—no, I mean Miss Miriam Fortescue, will join us at luncheon to-day."

Mr. Trevelyan was fairly self-possessed, but he winced perceptibly.

"Do you think it exactly wise?" he asked.

"It will be unpleasant for everybody concerned, but on mature consideration I certainly think it will be wise. Tony probably hasn't got her properly focussed. He associated her only with limelight and laughter. He will see her to-day in a different setting, the setting of his own home and I fancy there will be an awakening. Please telephone to his office and ask Mr. Harley to do you a personal favour by seeing that Tony is kept indoors and busy until midday. That gives me a clear field. Now," she added lightly, "I will array myself for the occasion."

The problem of arraying herself suitably, however, presented difficulties. The task before her was to enmesh Miss Fortescue and to do that she guessed a glaring display would be most effective. Mrs. Trevelyan's idea of a glaring display was in reality nothing of the kind and she presented a charming appearance when the train arrived. She was a little shaky, but nobody would have guessed it.

THE THEATRICAL "crowd" had had a long journey and they bore the appearance of it. Some went straight out of the station to "digs" engaged by the advance manager. One figure drew apart—the figure of a girl, who was looking about as though expecting someone. Mrs. Trevelyan instantly identified her.

Feeling as guilty as a thief, the mother went towards the actress. Something felt tight at her throat, but she did not waver.

"Miss Fortescue?" she asked, as sweetly as possible.

"That is my name," replied the girl, "but I don't remember you. You're—you're not the landlady?"

"I am Mrs. Trevelyan. You have met my son, I believe," the mother said, struggling to appear natural.

"Tony? Yes, I have met him," agreed the girl cautiously, stiffening.

She hated a scene, but something about Mrs. Trevelyan's personality told her that there would at least be no scratching. Instinct warned her to pause and let the other make the next move.

"My husband and I thought we should like to give him a pleasant surprise," said Mrs. Trevelyan. "Tony is unable to get away from the office this morning—and we felt sure you—in fact, both of you—would be disappointed, so I came down to ask you to join us at lunch. Perhaps, if you are not leaving here to-day, you could stay with us overnight?"

Mrs. Trevelyan felt conscious of the fact that doubt, suspicion, and wonder were chasing one another through the girl's mind. It was a relief to see there was nothing ostensibly coarse about her. She was, indeed, pretty in a theatrical way and doubtless could make herself attractive enough when it suited her purpose. At the moment, however, she was very much on her guard, and reminded Mrs. Trevelyan of some wild animal scenting danger.

"Did he tell you I was coming?" Miriam asked, so suddenly that the youth's mother was almost surprised into showing her hand.

"Dear me, no!" said Mrs. Trevelyan, with an unnatural little laugh. "We meant to surprise him. You see—"

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"I'm stopping overnight, too," the girl added, throwing off her hat as though she owned the place. "Dinky little show you've got," she commented, addressing Mr. Trevelyan and looking round admiringly.