

letter. But Mr. Morton Carter was regarding it with all the horror he had vainly sought to put into the expression of *Claude de la Courcelle* upon the sight of his *lettre de cachet*. "How—how much will it take to get them out again?"

By this time Mrs. Carter was beginning to partake of his emotion in spite of herself. "Why, it's only seven per cent., as you said, and the fees. Of course there was my cab fare, there and back—"

"Cab fare? Why, did you go over to the head office—on the Right Bank?"

"Certainly I did. Papa says it's always good business to go to the head office. Besides, how did I know that some time or other Miss Pastonbury mightn't have been at that place around the corner herself?"

It was a revelation of the femininely Michiavellian which staggered Mr. Carter almost as much as the pawning itself. "Well," he said at length, "just a little more than half our eleven francs is gone. Thank heaven we have the rest of it!"

"Oh,—if you must get it out of me, we haven't it all. I thought while I was over there, and near the Anglo-American, it would be a chance to—to get some tea that is really nice. You know how particular Elly Winston is about her tea. And—and, anyway, we've got it now."

"Yes, and I hope Elly Winston may choke on it!" He looked at his watch. "I'm not even sure there's time to make it to-day."

"Just as like as not there's a draft down at the *conciierge's* now!"

Thereupon he opened his hand and glanced at the card in it. He did not exclaim, or even change colour to any marked degree. But at the look which began as it were to warp his countenance, she exclaimed—"Oh, Morton,—it isn't—Not Miss Pastonbury—?"

"That's all! And she says on the other side—'Am passing through on my way to Switzerland with my cousin, Mrs. Gloyden. Shall be here until to-morrow afternoon. Shall try to come in again before six.'"

He was still holding the watch in his hand. It was now five-thirty.

"Well, at least," she cried, "that gives us some time to plan."

"Plan! All we can do is to put for it!"

"But she'd know from the *conciierge* that you got her card. And—and supposing we met her at the corner!"

She ran to the front window. "I knew it! I knew it! I knew it! She's just paying the cabman now!"

"We could both be laid out sick." And for his part he could have given the most perfect imitation of an exceedingly well-bred young man having a fit.

"If we both were, she'd insist on coming in. But I'm going to be! I couldn't be around after my taking the things out!" She fled into the bedroom. "You can tell her I've had a headache and am asleep."

"Well, my heavens, I like that! By James, I do! And how am I to square it with her?"

"Why, you're all the time making things up. It's your profession! And you know, Morton, you always say that when I offer you suggestions in your plots I only get you mixed!—I guess I'd help you if I could! But it—it needn't be any trouble at all! You can do it just as if it were a part of a story."

CHAPTER III.

Miss Pastonbury was a middle-aged, educated English spinster of inflexible principles and unconfiding temperament who had long gained a fair livelihood by teaching her language to the patrician youth of Paris. She had let her apartment during the period of her visit home, and she had let it to Americans—for whom, as a sister race, she had a very half-sisterly affection. But she had put that apartment under the egis both of the *conciierge* and the house agent. And, although she had not mentioned it to the Carters—she had from the beginning counted upon the present continental tour to give her the opportunity of returning at the end of the second month for a visit of inspection, herself.

Nor did Mr. Morton Carter need any psychic intuition to tell him that it was a visit of inspection. And while, outwardly, he was making apology for Mrs. Carter, and leading his guest to the seat in front of the fireplace, inwardly—with a tightening of every sinew of defence—his mind was speeding back to first and basic principles. He had once as a youngster, against parental warnings, applied the tip of his tongue to an iron pump handle in zero weather. Immediately in an ingenuous attempt to lick it off, he had followed it with the rest of his tongue, and his lips as well. And a moment later he was trussing his slobbered fingers beside his jaws

in the same agonising chancery. The experience had stayed with him ever afterward as a great moral and literary lesson. In all fiction, whether written or spoken, you put the end of your tongue to the pump handle perforce; but to attempt to remove it by more tongue—that way madness lies. Safety and strength are in no specious expansions, but in narration confined to the most Doric simplicity.

And already Miss Pastonbury's gaze had come to rest upon the shelf above the mantel. "Oh, I see you've been shifting things about a bit, Mr. Carter."

"Why—why, yes, just a little. What was it you



"At the last I made up my mind we could get on without the tea urn too."

—used to be there?"

"My little shepherd—the Dresden, you know. I was afraid for a moment there had been an accident."

"Oh—Oh, yes." He drew in his breath for it. "To tell the truth, Miss Pastonbury, we—we've been sending some of your china out to be looked at by the mender. Not that anything was broken—but they'd been a little knocked about and—"

"Oh, Mr. Carter!" There was bitter agony in her voice.

"Really—really! You can take my word for it. We sent them out just to be dead sure—entirely certain, you know! And they'll be home again to-morrow. You'll be able to see for yourself!"

"But I'm sure Christine—in my service she used always to be the very carefullest maid!"

"Oh, it wasn't Christine. She's all right. She's the pure McCoy, and it was awfully good of you to recommend her to us! It was a dog—Monsieur Lajeunesse's—Poigneau, you know. He was in one day, and got to jumping all over the place—"

"Why, I thought Monsieur Lajeunesse had gone to Ville d'Avray, and taken the great stupid brute along with him?"

"Yes, but he came back again next morning. You see, he'd forgotten some stuff." Having said so, he realised that when Miss Pastonbury went downstairs she would ask the *conciierge* about it, and learn that Monsieur Lajeunesse had never been back at all. It was the pump handle.

But, on this first occasion it did not seem to have

taken hold of him. Miss Pastonbury's eyes had dropped to the mantel. "Mr. Carter, I—I don't see my bowl! It wasn't broken?"

"Yes, but they weren't broken! I—I don't believe they were even cracked. It was just that we thought it safest to send them out. There was that pair of Gouda vases on your desk, too." (She was at that moment looking for them.) "They weren't damaged at all, though—not in the slightest."

She sat back and fairly shrilled at him. "But—Mr. Carter—the bowl stood directly over the hearthstone! I can't see how it escaped being absolutely shattered!"

"Heh! Well—well, to tell the truth it did have the closest kind of squeak! If it hadn't been that one of the cushions happened to be lying right beneath it at the time!" He re-set his smile. "It was funny, wasn't it?"

"Oh!—oh, yes, indeed!" They were cushions which Miss Pastonbury had embroidered herself.

"And I must tell you about the other things—the shepherd and the Gouda vases." A drop ran suddenly down in front of his left ear. "Monsieur Lajeunesse managed to catch them half way. We saw them just as they were going. It was mighty quick work, though!"

"Oh! oh, yes, it must have been."

Until now Miss Pastonbury had been sitting with her back to the serving table and the china cupboard. But during the last few moments—and she had her excuse in the levelled glare of the sun—she had been gradually shifting her position. Cupboard and table came within her field of vision at last. And, as she had only too strongly suspected, there was to be seen neither Queen Anne tray nor three-piece service nor ancestral tankard!

Mr. Carter had marked the direction in which her eyes had travelled. And now—with what might very well have been mistaken for eagerness—he began at once to speak about that silver. In fact he had been just about to bring it up. To tell the truth they didn't seem to have had the right sort of polish for it. It had kept on getting duller and more tarnished in spite of all they could do. And in the end they had made up their minds to have it cleaned up decently. When she returned she could count on finding the things in practically the same condition as when she had left them. They had felt it only right to see that they were kept in proper shape. He smiled upon her more reassuringly than a nephew trying to borrow money.

Miss Pastonbury also smiled, but not reassuringly at all. Albeit it might not lie upon the surface, she had blood in her that had produced three Crown prosecutors and a master in chambers. Now she saw herself verily called to the hour of act, and she cooled to it professionally, as it were.

"Why, that was very good of you, Mr. Carter, very good, I'm sure!"

"Oh, not at all. And it was really Mrs. Carter's suggestion."

"Yes? And you were so fortunate in finding a place where they do re-polishing, weren't you? I've heard there's such a shop just down on the Rue Monge. Perhaps that was where you left it in?"

"No. No, we were a little afraid to trust it there. We took it across to the Right Bank. We found a big place over there where they do all sorts of mending and fine metal-polishing."

"Yes? Then I needn't worry about my silver at all, need I?"

"No, not a bit!"

"And that's really a kind of place I've always been looking for, myself. I must get the address from you now, before it slips me."

The pump handle had found him at last. But he tried to get a grip on himself. "Yes, yes, of course! It was one of those new places on the Boulevards, you know."

"I thought it must be. And the name?"

He swallowed, and then swallowed again. But whatever he was swallowing at, it grew only the more chokingly huge. "La—Les—"

"You mustn't let a little mispronunciation bother you, you know, Mr. Carter."

"Heh!—Heh, heh!—George, I don't seem able to remember! It was—it began with—"

"I could very likely place it myself by the street—?"

He had the sensation of thinking very hard, but he knew that he had entirely ceased to think. He still maintained his smile, though. He felt, somehow, that in continuing to smile he had a power

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