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they attend. Day by day he falls more deeply in love with the beautiful girl who accepts his attentions with an exasperating coolness and indifference.

The climax is reached at the Kennedy's ball, where, as usual, he makes his appearance immediately after the entrance of her grace and Gladys. The latter gives a smiling assent to his request for a dance, but he is much chagrined to find that only one valse is available. He frowns darkly at the row of straggling heiroglyphics, then glances up at the girl entreatingly.

"Cannot you possibly manage to give me a second dance?" he asks, with an imploring glance.

"I am sorry, but you are too late. You see my card is quite filled."

"But you can cancel one of these in my favor?" he asks, earnestly.

She looks up at him in genuine surprise.

"Oh, no that is out of the question."

Ellerton is extremely annoyed at his failure to secure any sign of preference from Lady Gladys, but determines to make the best of his single opportunity.

The duchess meanwhile has listened to the little colloquy with infinite amusement. She considers Lord Ellerton a terribly spoiled young man, and is of opinion that a little snubbing will be highly beneficial to him.

The room is crowded and extremely warm, and Lord Ellerton has no difficulty in persuading his partner to sit out their dance in the cool of the conservatory adjoining the ballroom.

"Mrs. Stanhope took me to call upon Lady Castleton yesterday afternoon," he said tentatively, anxious to see if she would evince surprise or displeasure.

"Indeed," she responds, in some surprise, "Did you find her in?"

"Oh, yes; thanks. What a charming woman she is."

The girl merely bowed her head in assent, and directs the conversation into other channels. Evidently she does not care to discuss her home life with him.

"I suppose you will soon be leaving Winterton House, will you not?" he queries, with a keen glance at the beautiful face.

"Oh, yes; papa is anxious for me to return. I shall be here only a few days longer."

Just then, to his keen annoyance, the duchess approaches.

"Why did you not bring Lady Gladys back to me?" she asks, reproachfully. I have been searching everywhere for you."

Her grace insists upon returning to the ballroom, where Gladys is instantly carried off by eager partners, and Lord Ellerton has no opportunity of further conversation with her that evening. On his way home that night he decides that he will call upon Lord Castleton next morning, and ask his consent to his marriage with Gladys.

The former is considerably astonished when the young man presents himself with a request to be allowed to propose to his daughter. He is not altogether prepossessed in this suitor's favor, for it is plain from his manner that he looks upon an alliance with himself as an indisputable honor.

"If my daughter chooses to accept your proposal, Lord Ellerton, I shall raise no objection, but the decision rests entirely in her own hands. Shall I acquaint her with your proposal?"

"Oh, no, thank you," replies the suitor, eagerly. "I merely wished to ask your permission before attempting to win Lady Gladys' heart. I dare not flatter myself that she would accept me were I to propose to her immediately."

Lord Castleton invites him to remain to luncheon, an invitation which is accepted with alacrity.

Although Lady Castleton treats her guest with extreme cordiality, his former unfavorable opinion of her is deepened upon this occasion, and again he is assailed by that inexplicable sense of familiarity. On leaving the house an hour later, he encounters Lord Esdale.

"Hullo!" exclaims his lordship. "Where are you bound for?"

"Well, I was about to call on your mother, if it is not too early."

"Have you been to the Castletons?"

Ellerton nods. "Yes, I have been lunching there; but I was not at all sorry to quit her ladyship's society. What on earth possessed Castleton to marry her? I wonder where on earth he can have met her?"

"I don't know what you mean by that," cries Esdale, indignantly. "She is a woman any man might fall in love with. In my opinion, she's one of the most beautiful women I've ever met, and her singing is divine."

Ellerton utters an impatient exclamation.

"Really, Esdale, you seem determined to make a fool of yourself. I must confess that I cannot understand your infatuation for a woman of that description."

Esdale flushes crimson as he extends his hand in farewell.

"As we're not likely to agree upon that subject, Ellerton, it isn't much use discussing it any further. Good-by."

The two men take leave of one another, and Ellerton is fully aware that Esdale will pay no heed to his words, but will pursue his way blindly in defiance of the advice of his friends, for the sake of the woman who appears to have so powerful a fascination for him.

That afternoon Gladys finds herself left alone in the drawing-room with Lord Ellerton, and the unusually grave expression of his face warns her that he is about to speak upon some matter of moment. Instinctively she draws a little away from him, but her evident reluctance only serves to increase his ardor, for Ellerton is not used to being treated in this fashion.

His manner is perfection, as—having acquainted her with his interview with Lord Castleton—very courteously and deferentially he lays his proposal before her. He tells her that he does not presume to think that she already cares for him, but if she will allow him he hopes in time to be able to win her love.

Gladys colors deeply. "I am extremely honored by your proposal, Lord Ellerton," she answers nervously, "but I have known you such a short time, and I—"

"But there is no need for you to decide just yet," he cries, eagerly. "I know perfectly well that it is impossible you should care for me yet, but won't you give me an opportunity of endeavoring to gain your affection—that is all I ask."

"I think it would be better to let me answer in the negative now, Lord Ellerton; I could not guarantee that I should ever care for you; indeed, I think it is most unlikely. It would be far wiser for you to give up all thought of me."

"But is there anyone else whom you care for?"

"No," she answers, reluctantly.

"Then I am content to wait in the hope of gaining your love," he says. "May I?"

And although Gladys is greatly averse to his project, she cannot very well decline a suitor who pleads so humbly to be allowed to gain her hand.

The duchess is full of curiosity to hear how Ellerton's wooing has sped, for she gleans nothing from the expression of Gladys' face. His lordship does not look crestfallen, neither does he wear the aspect of radiant happiness which one expects of a man who has recently been accepted by the lady of his choice.

Gladys explains the situation, and her grace laughs.

"I expect you will marry him in the end," she says, patting the girl's cheek affectionately.

"Oh, no, I really don't think so," says Gladys earnestly. "I would much rather have refused him definitely if he would have allowed me."

Ellerton is so constantly at her side after this that people begin to look upon their engagement as a matter of course. Two days later Gladys returns to her own home.

She is accompanied by the duchess, who is none too pleased to discover her son in Lady Castleton's drawing-room, though no inkling of the intimacy between them has reached her. Her visit is as brief as it is consistent with the demands of etiquette, and when she rises to go she glances across sternly at her son.

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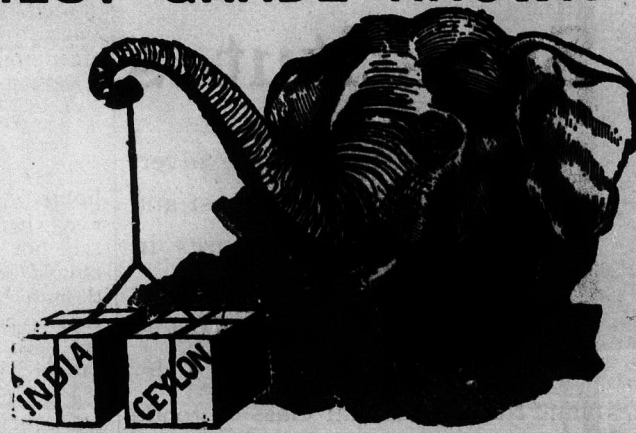
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