

tiful was she in a modern corsage and coiffure: and if coming ages failed to see the beauty, so much the worse for them. Never had she seemed to him so desirable as when she reclined in sweet abandon on that modern sofa, and that modern sofa should be part and parcel of his realistic design. And so he threw himself heart and soul into the fulfilment of this scheme. Hour after hour and day after day his lovely wife would pose before his ravished eyes, and charm him with her wit, which was ever at its best in his dear presence. But, delightful as was this monopolising of this fairest of all fair women to him, there was deep down in his heart the conviction that it was rather the gratification to her vanity, than a cordiality born of love for him, that made her so surpassingly kind and sympathetic.

The fact of the matter was that a defined jealousy had got place in his heart. Amongst others of Hermione's friends who had obtained the entree to his studio since their marriage was a certain noble cousin of hers, Lord Harborough, an aristocrat, a born critic and dilettante, and, withal; a very true and noble gentleman. Hermione and he had been as brother and sister in their childhood, and had not dropped the outward symbols of such relationship, now they were grown up. And Pygmalion, Leontes-like, magnified these innocent little familiarities into "a paddling of palms" and "a pinching of fingers," and was consumed with an unreasoning jealousy.

As bad fortune would have it, Hermione and her cousin had, in truth, a very important secret between them, and Pygmalion, with his suspicions all agog, was not slow to notice that there was an understanding between these two, and that unspoken communications constantly were passing between them, they evidently being under the impression that he saw nothing of their covert glances.

The fact was that Lord Harborough had conceived a tremendous admiration for the genius of his pretty cousin's husband, and, being a man of considerable influence, had determined to do what lay in his power to obtain for him the patronage of a very exalted personage, whose reputation as a dilettante was such that recognition by him would most probably presage the attainment of the highest honours. This Royal connoisseur was in London for the season, and Lord Harborough felt that it was an opportunity not to be lost of advancing Pygmalion's interests.

The thing was to be kept a profound secret from the sculptor, as they knew, that he would hesitate to accept any favours or patronage if there was even a hint that they were not wholly spontaneous. He, they knew, had no idea of being beholden to any of his grand relations for advancement.

Now, one thing that Lord Harborough insisted upon, as necessary to the successful attainment of their subject, was that Hermione should again show herself in society—a thing which she had rather avoided doing since her marriage, as her husband, she knew, would never be induced to accompany her. The realisation, Lord Harborough said, that Pygmalion Smith had a more than personable wife could not but prove favourable to their scheme.

As a consequence, Hermione was soon in a whirl of engagements, and Pygmalion found himself evening after evening deprived of that society which had become essential to his happiness. He had never sought the friendship of his fellows, and knew not the joys of club whist, nor appreciated the gossip of club smoking-rooms. The inspirer of his genius away, he grew day by day more despondent, more jealous, more miserable. When his wife sat to him in the mornings, he somewhat recovered his spirits. Indeed, at no time could he resist the fascination of her presence. But these glimpses of happiness in the daytime seemed to make the gloom of his evenings the more intolerable.

Poor Pygmalion was in a very bad way, and by degrees he came to contemplate the prospect of an evening spent alone with a horror only possible to one of so nervous and highly-strung a temperament. Once or twice, indeed, he had been startled at finding himself standing, chisel and mallet in hand, half determined, in the wildness of his jealousy and the fury of his passionate disappointment, to disfigure and destroy the glorious portrait of his wife over which he had expended his best powers, his most subtle and delicate handicraft. Once, indeed, the sharp edge of the steel had, in fact, been held against the snowy marble bosom, and the mallet had been raised to drive it home, but it had come in upon his maddened heart that this was half way to murder, and the poor fellow had sunk down upon his knees and found relief in abundant tears of passionate repentance.

But all this time Pygmalion was too proud even to hint to Hermione that anything was wrong with him. And she, in blissful ignorance, half-enjoying for their own sakes the renewal of old amusements, but chiefly valuing them for the advantages which she believed would, through them, accrue to her husband, gave herself up to an increasing round of gaiety.

And all this, of course, convinced Pygmalion more and more that his wife had tired of him, and was bent upon annulling, as far as was possible, the consequences of her marriage—the mere passing caprice, as he believed it to have been, of a high-spirited girl. He cursed the folly that had ever induced him to believe that he was a fit mate for this most glorious

and most beautiful of God's creatures.

It was early in July, and there was to be a grand reception at the Hungarian Embassy, in Portland-place. An extremely select dinner-party was to precede it, and, by a most wonderful piece of manoeuvring on the part of Lord Harborough, Mrs. Pygmalion Smith was to find herself on the right hand of the exalted personage.

Hermione, as may be imagined, was, at this piece of news, in a great flutter of excitement, and, as she sat to her husband that morning, had, wrapped about her, an unmistakable air of mystery. How she prayed that she might so bear herself in the evening as to make a favourable impression upon her husband's hoped-for patron!

Now, Pygmalion had made up his mind on this particular morning to make one final effort to regain that happiness and contentment which he had of late felt so certainly slipping away from him. He had determined to see whether or no his wife valued her newly-found almost daily emancipation above his devoted love and companionship. True, he had little hope that the fellowship of one poor hunchback could compete with the gay association of that brilliant society to which she by nature belonged, but he felt that the present state of things was unbearable and he had better know the worst.

"Hermione, my darling!" he said, for he had never yet dropped one single outward sign of endearment, "I'm going to ask a little favour of you to-day."

"A little favour, Lion, you old stupid—what do you mean by talking of favours to me? How often must I tell you that there is no pleasure greater to me than doing what you wish? The only fault I have to find with you is that you will never tell me what you do want. When I ask you what you would like me to do, you always put me off with that stupid old saying of yours, 'Be happy and look happy, and you will make me happy!'"

Pygmalion laughed, for who could resist the fascination of being called an old stupid by such sweet lips as those?

"Well, Hermione, granted that all you say is right, I am really going to ask you to give up something for me to-day. I want you to stay at home and spend this evening with me."

"What, this evening! Oh, Lion! why didn't you ask me anything else? I—I promised Harborough faithfully that I would go to the Hungarian Embassy to-night; and, besides that, I'm invited to the dinner. It's quite possible! Oh! please—please don't ask me to stay away from that. Really—really, Lion, there's anything I would do for you. You don't know what you are asking me to do. I gave my word that nothing should prevent my being there."