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Summer Supply Catalogue is now ready. Write for it.

LARRY O'NEILL

Half an hour past noon on a bright May day Larry O'Neill, for lack of anything better to do, dropped into Christie's salerooms. Some necessary legal business had obliged him to leave his retirement in Donegal, and when he found that the family solicitors were not to be hurried into any unbusiness-like speed, he had found time heavy on his hands. Once he would have had no difficulty in spending a few days pleasantly enough in London, but that was prior to the time of the occurrence that had transformed the light-hearted Captain Lawrence O'Neill into a gloomy and morose recluse.

The famous salerooms were pretty well filled, and Larry found an unoccupied chair, and looked indifferently around him. As he did so, the occupant of the next seat turned towards him, eyed Larry doubtfully for a few minutes, and then held out his hand.

"Captain O'Neill, isn't it?" the man said eagerly.

Larry's face darkened.

"No—I am in the service no longer, Mr. Hilton," he said quietly.

"Well, you're Larry O'Neill, anyhow," Mr. Hilton said, "though I never knew you had a taste for bric-a-brac."

"Oh, I haven't!" Larry smiled slightly, "merely strolled in here because I had nothing else to do. Are you purchasing?"

"I have just bought a Kang-he vase," Mr. Hilton replied. "It is very unique." Then he sighed. "One has to cultivate an interest in something or other."

"I suppose so," Larry assented indifferently, and rose to his feet. Mr. Hilton did likewise.

"There's nothing else I want," he explained. "Come to my flat for luncheon, will you, Law?"

Larry began an excuse. Mr. Hilton interrupted him.

"You'll do me a kindness, really, old fellow," he urged. "I'm very lonely at times," and then Larry remembered that Mr. Hilton's wife, to whom he had been tenderly attached, had died at San Remo seven or eight years before.

"Thanks, then, I will," Larry assented, "but I should warn you that I'm not the best of company."

"Neither am I," Hilton responded. Soon afterward the two men were seated at a simple, well-cooked luncheon in a quiet street not far from Piccadilly.

"I couldn't bear the country," the elder man confessed, "nor the house where Jane and I had lived so long alone together. My nephew, who will succeed me, occupies the house in the summer. I brought a couple of the old servants with me to London."

Larry was sympathetically silent.

"But you, Larry, why have you turned hermit? Jane liked you—for her sake, excuse what may seem an impertinent question," Mr. Hilton went on after a moment.

Larry looked across the table.

"Do you not know?"

"Know!" Mr. Hilton shook his head. "But there—perhaps my question roused painful memories. Don't—"

Larry laughed—a hard, bitter laugh.

"Painful memories are seldom long away from me," he said. "You know I went to India?"

Mr. Hilton nodded.

"Well, I was in command of a troop during a period of unrest among the natives. A certain tribe was disaffected, and we dreaded a rising. It took place, and though we had been in a measure expecting it, we were surprised at the moment I was in command, and I blundered hopelessly."

"How was that?"

"I don't in the least know. I felt drunk, stupid, dazed, and my man had to help me into the saddle. What orders I gave I have no idea; but we were beaten back ignominiously, disgracefully, and through me. Only for Tyson, the next in authority, matters would have been worse. As it was, India and England rang with the miserable story. There were some who said, because I was an Irishman, that I was a traitor."

"But could you not account in any way—"

"In no way. I have no recollection of anything really till our defeat was accomplished. I was a ruined and disgraced man. For myself, though I loved the service, it would not have mattered; but my father—the old man believes we are descended from Conn of the Hundred Fights. You can guess the blow it was to him to hear his only son described as a coward or a traitor."

"Larry, you were neither!"

"I was one or the other to all men. My father never openly reproached me or questioned me. Ah, Hilton, I think I could have borne it better if he had. I retired to Carrickdun, and I have tried, God knows, to make the best of things both for him and me. Sometimes I see a look on the old man's face that seems to me to ask for an explanation, and I can give none. I wonder you did not hear of the affair at the time it occurred."

"When was it?"

Larry mentioned a date.

"Ah! My wife was dying then, abroad," Mr. Hilton said. "I was only interested in that fact. And then—things are speedily forgotten. Some new sensation turns up."

Larry nodded, a deeper shadow overspreading his face.

"I seldom leave home," he said, after a moment, "but I had to come here. A piece of land was sold to the railway company. I dreaded meeting any of the set I once knew. I need not have feared—not things alone, but people, are forgotten. You are the first to recognize me."

Mr. Hilton played nervously with his fork. He had liked Larry O'Neill well in the days long past, and ventured on a question hesitatingly.

"And— you were engaged, Larry. Did the marriage come off?"

"No—how could it? I released Miss Trevor. She accepted her release."

"Miss Trevor—Constance Trevor?"

Mr. Hilton thought a moment. "She is unmarried yet. I saw her at some art show not so long since—as beautiful as ever. Did she act under compulsion? Her father was rather determined."

"There was no compulsion. Constance simply thought as the world thought—I was either a traitor or a coward."

"Strange!"

"To none more so than to me,"

Larry said. "How could any one account for what was unaccountable? There was only one person who believed in my honesty and courage."

"Who was that?"

"Mollie Blake. Miss Trevor's mother was Irish, you know. That's how my acquaintance with the family began. Mrs. Trevor was Mollie's aunt. Poor Mollie! She was an orphan, unprovided for, and exceedingly simple, young, uninformed, and quite ignorant of the world, too. Yet her vigorous and foolish championship gave me comfort. I wonder what became of the child?"

Mr. Hilton shook his head.

"Like you, I have not mixed much with my kind."

There was a long silence. Mr. Hilton was not an adept at the art of making conversation. He tried to think of something to talk about, while Larry sat grave and abstracted, his thoughts far back in the past. The host was relieved by a summons from his man servant, and left the room. When he returned he carried a vase in his hand. Larry had not moved.

"This is my recent purchase," Mr. Hilton began. "It belonged to Sir Stephen Mereham, once Foreign Secretary. He died a year ago."

"Yes," Larry responded, "I know. A sister of his was married to an officer in my—the regiment. Mrs. Tyson was a pretty, hysterical little woman, but very kind. She was much affected by that unfortunate affair. More than she had the least right to be, seeing we were mere acquaintances."

Mr. Hilton had no desire to go back to the unsatisfactory subject. He began divesting the vase of its inner wrappings.

"Just look at this, Larry," he said; "even if you aren't an art critic, the vase will appeal."

There was a loud crash. The precious vase had slipped from its owner's hands and fallen on the side of the brass fender.

"Oh!" Larry ejaculated. Mr. Hilton was gazing at the fragments in consternation.

"What a pity!" Larry said. "And the thing is shattered, I fear. No patching of it up."

"No, no," Mr. Hilton stooped over the pieces and lifted a couple of sheets of paper. Half mechanically he began reading them.

"God bless me, God bless me!" he cried. "How on earth—what on earth!" He dropped into a chair and went on reading while Larry retreated to the windows and looked out. When he turned from his momentary contemplation of the opposite houses Mr. Hilton was still reading, with distended eyes, the thin, crumpled sheets of paper.

"Larry, Larry! Do you know what this is! It is most marvelous, most wonderful! How fortunate I am to find it! God bless me! Mr. Hilton ejaculated excitedly.

"What is the matter, Hilton?" Larry inquired.

"And you here! Why, it is simply astonishing, dramatic!" Mr. Hilton tried to compose himself, and held forth the sheets. "This is a letter from Mrs. Tyson to her brother, Sir Stephen. He must have struck it into the vase."

"Indeed!" Larry observed.

"And forgotten about it. He was absent-minded, it is said, or perhaps he compromised with his conscience. One doesn't know, can never know," Mr. Hilton said. "Read the letter, Larry."

"Why should I read what was not intended for my eyes?"

"Not for mine," Mr. Hilton laughed; then added solemnly: "Why, Larry, it is your justification. It was Mrs. Tyson that had you—drugged."

"Drugged?"

"Yes. She was nervous about her husband going into action, into danger—a poor foolish goose of a woman she was, I should judge. She obtained some powerful native drug from an Indian servant, which she determined to administer to her husband when the hour of danger arrived. The dose was warranted to produce a form of illness that would render the person taking it quite unconscious. The illness was to resemble an attack of heart trouble that would even deceive medical men. Well, the woman placed the powder in a cup of coffee, and in the confusion of the moment you drank it, and not Tyson."

Larry raised his hand to his head.

"Wait a moment, please. I remember the coffee. It tasted queer, and I did not finish it."

"Consequently you missed the full dose."

"Tyson got all the credit out of the rising. He is General Tyson now," Larry said. "He was a brave soldier."

"His wife was not a fit mate for him, evidently. She did not confess anything till your ruin was accomplished. Then she wrote to her brother, telling him all."

"I can not believe it!"

"There it is in black and white. What are you going to do, Larry?"

Larry made no reply.

"Look here," said Hilton, "let me interview Mrs. Tyson. I know her. She is a society woman, and capable of denying the affair altogether if she is allowed. Let me tackle her. She

might suspect you, and be prepared."

Thus it was that Mr. Hilton journeyed into fashionable quarters that same afternoon, and was fortunate enough to find Mrs. Tyson alone in her drawing-room. He told the story of that interview to Larry O'Neill at dinner.

"She's a poor, weak creature, and capitulated almost at once. She was simply bewildered into doing so. The lapse of time had left her almost forgetful of India. What will you do, Larry?"

Mr. Hilton was not left unanswered as before.

"Nothing, I think. So many years have passed, and I have grown accustomed to the present state of things. My father, of course, shall know."

Hilton determined differently.

"Oh, well, perhaps you are right," he commented, in non-committal tones; but next day he sought and obtained an interview with an important personage in the Foreign Service. He also called on Miss Trevor. As a result of these two calls Larry received a couple of invitations. The interview with the important man did not last long. Larry was determined to leave the past alone, and perhaps the Foreign Office individual was not altogether sorry. His interview with Constance Trevor lasted longer. The passing years had touched the lady but lightly. She was fully as beautiful, perhaps more so, than when Larry had seen her last; nevertheless he greeted her, much to his own surprise, without a quickened pulse.

"No, don't apologize, Constance," Larry said. "I may call you Constance, may I not? You could do nothing but follow the example of all the world. Nobody kept belief in me—well, excepting little Mollie Blake. By-the-by, has she married yet?"

"No. She developed modern independent notions after her mother's death, and is a hospital nurse. Just at present she is spending a part of her annual holiday with me. She will be down in a moment or two. Won't

you take a cup of tea—Larry?"

Not only on that afternoon, but on several subsequent ones, did Larry partake of tea in Miss Trevor's drawing-room. Constance was never deceived. It was not for her sake he lingered in London even when his business at the lawyers' had been accomplished. Four months later Hilton was induced to visit Carrickdun, and one September evening he and Larry's father—the latter younger in looks and spirit than for years back—sat smoking by an open window while Larry and his wife strolled about in the gathering dusk.

"Mollie is just the wife for him," Mr. O'Neill commented. "She says she would have married him at that unfortunate time had he asked her; but, of course, she was only seventeen then."

"And Irish-hearted," Mr. Hilton replied. "I have a sort of pity for Miss Trevor, and," the speaker laughed, and for myself."

"Yourself?"

"Yes. Didn't the truth come out through the breaking of my beautiful Kang-he vase? It was smashed, you know, and it was a beauty," and Mr. Hilton laughed again, lightly, as if he were well pleased.—Magdalen Rock.

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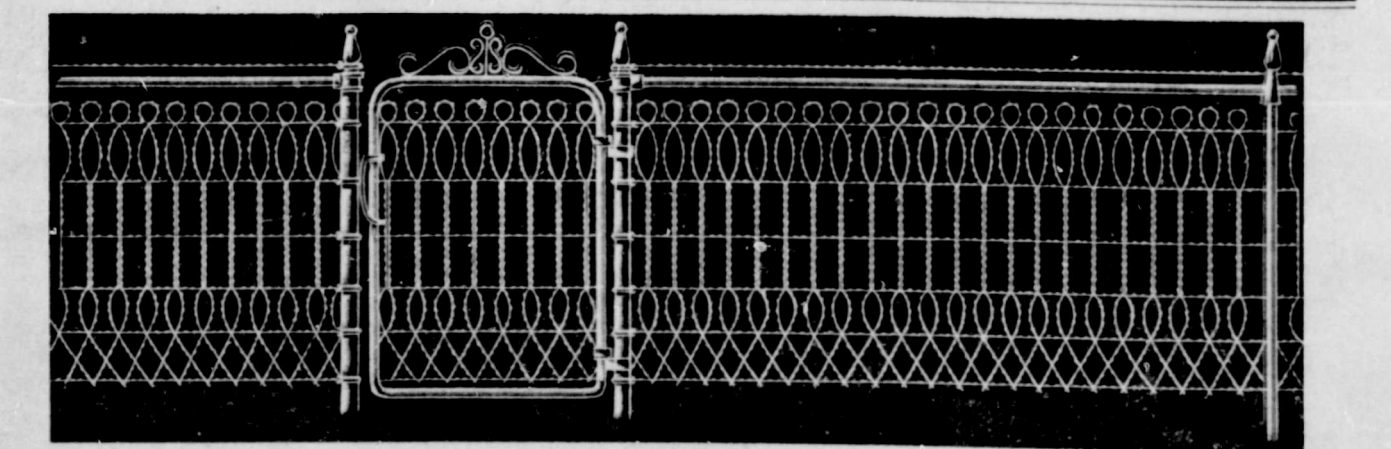
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