

but, as her sole aim and object is to amuse herself, she does not make much pretence of caring about one man more than another, nor does she attempt to disguise her liking for variety. Her admirers, if they are sensible men, understand this, and regulate their conduct accordingly. Lacy, who was a quiet, easy-going fellow, understood it, I suppose, well enough; but poor Percival didn't understand it at all, and the agonies that he suffered when he was left out in the cold were pitiable to witness. He was at Cannes altogether about a fortnight, I think, and I am sure I don't exaggerate when I say that he must have lost a stone's weight in that time. His face grew quite haggard and lined, his eyes had an unnatural brightness as if he did not sleep well at night, and—most portentous of all—his vile temper seemed to have been completely cast out of him. At dinner, one evening, a waiter upset a plate of soup over his shoulder, and he got up meekly and went off to change his coat without saying a word.

In common humanity I felt bound, at last, to direct Florry's attention to these symptoms, and to warn her that Percival was not as other men are. "Poor dear old Carrots!" she said. "And so you really think that he has grown thinner? How nice of him! It will be a long time before you will allow any woman to reduce *your* weight, Charley."

I said I humbly hoped it might be a very long time indeed.

"There is a great deal that is delightful and original about Carrots," she went on pensively. "Sometimes I am almost inclined to give him what he wants, and become Mrs. Carrots."

"And won't he lead you a life if you do!" thought I to myself; but I only said, "you'll have to make haste about it then; for if he goes on wasting at his present rate of progress, there'll be nothing left of him at the end of another month."

Perhaps Florry was alarmed at this prospect; for she now took Percival into favor again, and began snubbing Lacy, who didn't seem to care much. Lacy appeared to me to hold wise and philosophical views of life, and to accept the pleasures of dalliance for what they were worth. When Florry smiled upon him he basked in her smiles with perfect contentment; when she frowned, he wrapped himself in his own virtue and took a hand at whist, while his lady-love and his rival wandered about the garden, enjoying the scent of the orange-blossoms and the balmy breezes of the Mediterranean, and the moonlight, and all the rest of it. Other things being equal, I know which of the two men I should have chosen for a husband, if I had been a young woman, and the choice had been offered me; and in this case other things were about equal; for Mrs. Neville informed me that Lacy was very well off, and had excellent prospects. She also confided to me that she was dreadfully frightened of Percival, and wished to goodness he would go away. "A red Othello!" she said; "I couldn't bear to think of my daughter's passing her life with him."

I don't know whether Florry was beginning to think seriously of passing her life with him; but it soon became evident that she did not intend to pass the whole of her time with him at present. After a day or two, Lacy was whistled back; and others beside Lacy had their share of encouragement. Then, just as Percival was upon the point of despairing utterly, he, in his turn, was recalled; and so the game of see-saw went on. See-saw is as good a form of amusement as another, so long as you remember where you are, and have your feet ready to touch the ground when your end of the plank goes down. You then descend gently and rise again in a graceful and dignified manner; and this was what Lacy did. But if you imagine that your seat is a steady one, you are apt to bump Mother Earth suddenly and heavily, and to be carried aloft again with ridiculous plunges and total loss of balance; and this was what happened to Percival. He took it all, as I have said, with wonderful submissiveness. I suspect that Florry must have given him a hint that, despite appearances, he was really the favored suitor; at least, I cannot account in any other way for the fact that he never once proposed to punch Lacy's head.

But a rude awakening was in store for him. There was a good deal of gayety of a mild order going on at Cannes, and the Nevilles were constantly dragging me off to balls given by one or the other of the English people who had villas in the place. I am not very passionately fond of dancing myself; so I generally contrived to slip out and smoke a quiet cigar in the garden while the others were scuffling about and making themselves hot indoors; and I was enjoying myself in this way one evening, when Percival came out of the house and flung himself down upon the bench beside me.

I had the privilege of seeing him dance once—his performance much resembled that of the proverbial bear upon a hot plate—and I at once conjectured that Florry had sent him about his business, and that he had sought me out with a view to pouring forth the pent up bitterness of an overcharged spirit. But that, it seemed, had not been his intention. He was rather dejected, but not at all wrathful, and, although he talked about nothing but Florry, he did not mention her by name. He spoke, in a subdued and somewhat pathetic tone, of women generally, and laid down the proposition that their conduct was not to be judged by the standards which are supposed to govern the actions of men. A woman's love of admiration, for instance, was something outside our experience. We were too coarse and too matter-of-fact to enter into it; and he was persuaded that we often in our haste condemn girls as flirts who didn't at all deserve that name, but were merely indulging in a very natural and innocent pastime.

"You see, Oliver, a woman has precious few amusements, when you come to think of it, and I don't see why we should grudge her those that she can get. I shall never be in for being one of those selfish brutes of husbands who won't let their wives go into society, and who look black at them if they speak to another man."

(To be continued.)



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