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A MASTER OF MEN

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(CHAPTER XVIII—(Continued.)

"Is this a joke?" Strone asked. "How could you welcome such a firebrand amongst your well-ordered ranks? I should be a cuckoo in the nest with a vengeance."

It was Lord Sydenham's turn to smile.

"You alarm me," he said. "Your natural history carries you so far no doubt as to remember what follows the advent of the cuckoo. Do me the credit, Strone, to believe that Iam not making you this offer without serious consideration, and I am not making it upon my own initiative alone. I know very well that you are no harebrained Socialist. You do not preach the nationalisation of the land or any such foolery. You know very well that no human laws can make equal men born into the world with diverse gifts. As for the rest, I can assure you that the thinking men of my party are as eager as you are for the betterment of the poor. Some of your own pet schemes will be part of our programme for next session. Join us and you shall take charge of these measures. You will strengthen us, and you will give the people in the great manufacturing centres confidence in our desire to legislate for them. You yourself will be in the position to do effective work which you could never attain to by any other means. We believe in you, Strone, and your motives. I do not wish to appeal to your personal ambition in any way, but—we will make you the youngest Cabinet Minister since the days of Pitt."

A very rare agitation shook Strone's voice. He seemed to be looking no longer along the broad gaslit street, he saw down the avenues which lead to fame and high places, he saw the passionate dream of his earlier youth which of late had seemed so shadowy, so difficult of achievement, suddenly leaping into actual and vivid life.

"You have taken my breath away," he said. "But your party discipline is so arbitrary. I might find myself hopelessly at variance with you on some point or other—I could not pledge myself to unswerving service."

"We would not exact it of you." Lord Sydenham answered quietly. "As your political life grows so will your experience, and you will understand that of necessity life is made up of compromises. This is your street, is it not? I am going to leave you to think over what I have said. I do not press you for any immediate answer."

Strone held out his hand.

"You are very good, Lord Sydenham," he said. "It is useless, I suppose, to ask you to come in?"

Lord Sydenham nodded. "But I should like a cigar," he added, suddenly feeling his breast pocket. "I will come to your doorstep."

At the gate Strone looked up in quick surprise. It was one o'clock, and he had never doubted but that his house would be in darkness. The drawing-room, however, seemed to be a blaze of light. Whilst they stood there a man's voice singing a comic song came traveling out to them. It was not a particularly choice one, even of its order, and the man's voice was harsh and repulsive. At the close of the first verse the shrill laughter of women drowned the pianoforte. Lord Sydenham glanced at his companion. Strone's face was suddenly pale, and the hand which still rested upon the gate seemed striving to bend the wrought ironwork.

"On second thoughts," Lord Sydenham remarked, "I will smoke a cigarette. I have my case. God night, Strone."

"Good night, Lord Sydenham."

CHAPTER XIX.

Strone walked slowly up the steps, let himself in with his latchkey, and stood for a moment in the hall before the drawing-room door. The noise inside was unabated, his entrance had been unobserved. He was strongly tempted to pass upstairs to avoid a scene which he knew quite well would be repulsive to him. Then the sound of a man's voice, his wife's Christian name, her shrill reply, decided him. He opened the door and entered.

It was all very much what he had expected—and dreaded. The room was full of tobacco smoke. In the centre a card-table strewn with cards and cigar ash, empty champagne bottles, decanters and a medley of glasses. Milly was sitting upon the sofa, and by her side Dick Mason, his face flushed and ugly red, his arm in suspicious proximity to Milly's waist. His sister, in an outrageous pink gown, was sharing the piano stool with a young man whose face seemed repulsively familiar to Strone. Their giggling ceased at his entrance. Dick Mason removed himself with clumsy stealthiness from Milly's side. Milly alone seemed unmoved. She sat quite still, and eyed him defiantly. Her cheeks were flushed, her hair untidy, and she was smoking a cigarette.

"Well," she said, "home early, ain't you?"

"It is past one," he answered briefly. "How do you do, Miss Mason?"

He shook hands with her, and nodded to her brother. Then he glanced at the young man on the music-stool, and there was an awkward silence. Milly and Ada Mason exchanged glances. The latter began to talk volubly. The young man on the music stool smiled in a sickly fashion, and began to turn over the leaves of his song-book.

"We've been keeping your wife company for a bit, Mr. Strone," she said. "Such horrible hours you Parliament gentlemen keep. I shouldn't be able to do with my husband out till this time of night always. You must find it very dull, dear," she added, turning to Milly. "I am sure it would send me crazy unless I had a lot of nice lively friends."

Milly laughed heartily.

"Oh, we're supposed to get used to it, ain't we, Enoch? Don't stand there looking so solemn. Sit down and be sociable, do."

Strone did not move. Miss Mason rose with a toss of the head, which completed the dishevelment of her hair.

"I don't think Mr. Strone looks very much inclined to be sociable, Milly dear," she said. "Come on, Dick. We'd better be moving."

Her brother rose with alacrity, also the other young man. Milly pressed more drinks and cigars upon them, and bade them good-night in boisterous fashion, reminding them of an engagement for the next night. Strone opened the front door and shook hands with Ada Mason and her brother. But when the young man who had accompanied them tried to slink by, Strone's hand fell upon his shoulder like a vice.

"Listen," he whispered. "If ever I find you here again I shall thrash you, you understand. You little cur!"

The young man muttered something inarticulate and shuffled off. Strone closed the door, and returned to the drawing-room. Milly was there, stretched upon the sofa. She raised herself a little at his coming. She faced him with the old defiance in her eyes.

"Well!"

Strone looked meditatively around the room. Its condition and everything in it grated upon him. He stood with his elbow resting upon the mantlepiece, thinking. Once more Milly addressed him.

"Well! Got anything to say, eh? Out with it!"

He roused himself with an effort.

"There is a good deal to be said," he answered. "The question is whether it is worth while. Do you like this sort of thing, Milly?"

"Why not? I must have friends. I can't sit here alone—night after night."

"You can come down to the House."

"And listen to a lot of dry rot! No thanks!"

"You can take one of the maids and go to the theatre."

"Thanks. I tell you I ain't so fond of my own company, or of going round with servants."

"It seems to me, at any rate," he said, "that you could spend the time better than this."

"Oh, you're a fine judge," she cried passionately. "You go your way, better let me go mine. What do you care who my friends are, or how I pass the time? Not a scrap! It's only your beastly stuck-up vanity which makes you say a word about it. You think the Masons ain't class enough to come to your house. I don't care. They're good enough for me."

"You are wrong,' he answered coolly. "I will not have a young man come here who sits with his arm around your waist. I won't say I'm surprised, Milly—but I am disgusted."

"I thought you'd have something to say about that," she answered. "Where's the harm, anyway? Dick Mason and me are old pals. And what right have you to interfere, anyway? What sort of a husband are you to me, Enoch Strone, eh? Supposing I let him put his arm round my waist, or kiss me, what call have you to complain? We're a nice affectionate couple, ain't we? How do I know you ain't got some one you fancy? How do I know that ain't the reason you treat me, your wife, Enoch—like the dirt beneath your feet?"

Her voice had risen in strength, gained in passion at every syllable. She was on her feet now, facing him with blazing eyes. It seemed to Strone in that awful moment of self-revelation that she had become the accuser, that he himself was responsible for this loathsome scene, for all her follies, for all the follies which she might hereafter commit.

"You are mistaken, Milly," he cried hoarsely. "I have not treated you, I have not thought of you like that."

She had the upper hand. Heedless of how she gained it, she had pushed home her advantage. Her words lashed him like scorpions.

"Rot! You do! You have done every day. Do you think I ain't like other women?—because if you do, you're wrong. You think that because you don't beat me, give me money, and clothes, and a roof, that that's the end of it. Look 'ere. I shouldn't mind your beating me, I shouldn't mind if you got drunk, I shouldn't mind going to the pawnshop with all our fine things if—if—now and then you cared a bit, Enoch."

"I have been wrong Milly," he muttered.

"I didn't know that you felt it—like this!"

"Didn't know! How much did you care, eh? Enoch, perhaps I'm hard on you. You didn't want to marry me. I made you. More fool me. Give me a little money and I'll go away and live my own life amongst my own people. I can't go on like this any longer."

He set his teeth—crushed down a whole world of beautiful dreams, and faced his destiny.

"I have been wrong, Milly," he repeated. "We will let bygones be bygones. I will do my best to make you a better husband."

She crept slowly towards him.

"I ain't good enough for you, Enoch," she faltered, "and lately I've given up trying. It hasn't seemed any use. You've so many fine friends, and you're so clever, I feel somehow as though I were keeping you back. Better let me go away, Enoch. I'll change my name. I shan't ever disgrace yours."

"Rubbish," he answered, with an attempt at lightness. "We'll make a fresh start. . . You mustn't talk about going away."

He drew her to the sofa and kissed her. She sobbed herself to sleep upon his shoulder. Strone sat there with the dead weight of her body against his, a cold and terrible vigil. His eyes were fixed upon the disordered table, strewed with cards and cigar ash, the wine stains and empty glasses. The woman by his side slept like a child.

CHAPTER XXX.

Once again Milly felt herself taken at a disadvantage. She looked over the top of her novel from the sofa where she lay, and then rose slowly to her feet. She barely touched the tips of Lady Malingcourt's fingers.

"I have been meaning to come and see you for so long," Lady Malingcourt said in her quiet, even tone. "Please don't disturb yourself. May I sit here? Now I want you to tell me how you like living in London. It is such a change after Bangdon, isn't it?"

Milly set on the edge of the sofa. She wore an untidy dressing-gown, and she was conscious of it. Lady Malingcourt was, as usual, perfectly dressed.

"I don't think I care very much for London," Milly said slowly. "There are a great many people here, but they ain't sociable. Bangdon was lonesome, but I think I liked it best. You came to see me there, didn't you?"

Lady Malingcourt nodded.

"Yes! I am Mr. Martinghoe's sister, you know. We have both been very much interested in your husband's career. You must be very proud of him."

Milly's face darkened into downright sulkiness.

"I don't know as I am," she answered slowly. "It's all very well, his being a Parliament man and that, but I sometimes think it makes him forget he's got a home at all. I don't see nothing of him now. Every night he's out till the Lord knows what time, and I've got to sit here all alone."

"Still, you must like reading his speeches," Lady Malingcourt suggested. "Of course, you have been to hear him. My cousin is in the Cabinet, you know, and he thinks Mr. Strone quite one of the most promising debaters in the House."

"No, I've never heard him speak," Milly answered. "I read what he said once, but I couldn't understand a word of it. You see," she added a little defiantly, "I was a fatcory girl before he married me, and I didn't have no education to speak of."

Lady Malingcourt was a little nonplussed. She could not fail to see that Mily's attitude was belligerent. Nevertheless, she was there with a definite purpose before her, and she meant to go through with it.

"It is so easy to pick up things nowadays," she murmured, "and I think that all men like their womenkind to be interested in their concerns, don't you?"

"I don't!" Milly answered bluntly. "I haven't noticed anything of the sort about Enoch, I can tell you! He never tells me a word. What I know about his life outside this house I hear from Mr. Fagan."

Lady Malingcourt raised her eyebrows a little.

"I do not think," she said, "that Mr. Fagan is a very good friend of your husband!"

"And why not, indeed?" Milly demanded. "I call Mr. Fagan a real sensible man. He don't go poking his nose into the society of people who only want to make use of him. He minds his own business, in Parliament and out of it. That's the sort of man I like."

Lady Malingcourt declined a controversy.

"I only know Mr. Fagan politically," she remarked. "I had not formed a very high opinion of his talents. As a man of ability, he is not, of course, to be compared with Mr. Strone."

"Maybe," Milly answered. "I don't know about that. I only know that he doesn't go running after people who ain't his sort. He's a workman sent to Parliament to represent workmen, and he doesn't forget it."

Lady Malingcourt smiled pleasantly.

"My dear Mrs. Strone," she said "when you have been mixed up in politics as long as I have you will understand that a man's work does not begin and end in the House. Take your husband's case, for instance. He has become the recognized champion of some very important social movements. It is part of his task to bring round to his own way of thinking all people of influence and position. This he can only do by mixing in society. I happen to know that at a dinner party lately at Lord Sydenham's he completely won round the Duke of Massingham to his views upon a most important matter. The Duke, as you know, has the ear of the Upper House."

"Were you at that dinner-party?" Milly asked, with blunt irrelevance.

Lady Malingcourt stared.

"Yes," she answered. "I was there. Why do you ask?"

Milly flinched from the challenge.

"Oh, nothing! I daresay you may be right, Lady Malingcourt. All I can say is that I hate the whole show. I wish Parliament and all the rest of it were at the bottom of the sea. I don't care a bit about them. I want my husband. I never see anything of Enoch from morning to night. That may be the fashion in society. It isn't my idea of married life."

Lady Malingcourt was thoughtful.

"Mrs. Strone," she said, "I am sure you would not wish to be in any way a drag upon your husband. He is one of those few men to whom great things are possible, and we are all so much interested in him and his career. You must have a little patience with him just now. It is a very anxious time for him. You must let his friends try and amuse you a little. I want you to come and see me. We will have a little luncheon together quietly one day next week, and drive"—

Milly interrupted her. She had risen to her feet, and was standing with her hand resting upon the table. She was not an attractive picture to look upon.

"I'm so much obliged, Lady Malingcourt," she said, "but I'd rather not come. It's no good my playing at being a lady. I ain't one, and I shall never make one. Enoch knows that right enough. I should only be uncomfortable if I came to your house, and serve me right. If you want to do me a good turn, and I don't know why else you came here, don't encourage Enoch to get mixing himself up with your people. I know he's different to me—but I can't help that. He married me! I'm his wife, and I want him. And all the while I know that there's something gradually drawing him from me. It's going to these parties that's done it. He sees women, ladies who are more his sort, and it makes him colder and colder to me. He tries to be kind, but it hurts him. And he's mine—my husband! I won't have him taken away from me. He's mine—and I want him."

Milly, in a sudden paroxysm of jealousy, had betrayed herself. Her fierce tone, the angry gleam in her eyes, were unmistakable. The matter had become a personal one. This was the woman whom she feared. A rare flood of color streamed into Lady Malingcourt's pale cheeks. She hated this ignorant woman—she hated herself for the impulse of generosity which had brought her here. She rose to her feet.

"I'm afraid that I don't quite understand you, Mrs. Strone," she said. "The matter of your personal relations with your husband is, of course, no concern of mine. I wanted to offer you my friendship, to try and relieve a little the loneliness of which you complain. But"—

Milly interrupted her.

"Can't you see that I don't want your friendship—or anybody's?" she exclaimed bitterly. "I want my husband!"

Lady Malingcourt was very nearly angry.

"You must forgive me, Mrs. Strone, if I tell you that I think you are very unreasonable," she said. "You are, I imagine, fond of your husband. Don't you want to see him succeed—to realize his ambitions? You can do this best just now by forgetting yourself and your own desires. In years to come he will be grateful to you, he will remember this, and you will have the gratification of knowing that you helped him."

"I don't want Enoch to be a great man," Milly sobbed. "I only want him to remember that he is my husband—and—and I don't want anybody to come between us."

She subsided on to the sofa, and mopped at the tears which were streaming down her face. Lady Malingcourt watched her for a moment in silence, a dislevelled, untidy woman, her limitations written plainly enough in her pretty unexpressive face, puckered up just now into the semblance of a sulky child's. She glanced around the room, disfigured everywhere by Milly's lack of taste and love of bright colors. Then she straightened herself and her face hardened. Her first impulse of pity had gone. After all it was the man who must suffer.

"I am sorry that I am not able to be of any service to you, Mrs. Strone," she said. "Good afternoon."

Milly heard her let herself out without stirring, heard the jingling of harness outside, and from behind a curtain watched her visitor drive away. Then she sank back upon the sofa, and buried her head in a cushion.

"What does the like of her want—with my Enoch?" she asked bitterly.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"Quite a senatorial pose, Mr. Strone. Really I am not sure that I ought to interrupt. Only you see Lord Sydenham has left me alone with a terribly deaf old person, and I felt that I must either escape—or expire. Come and explain why you are not voting, and amuse me, if you can."

Strone was taken by surprise, but the length of her speech—and as usual she spoke very slowly—gave him plenty of opportunity to recover himself. He even found time to admire her wonderfully fitting grey gown, and the beflowered hat which a Parisian milliner had parted with unwillingly. Lady Malingcourt had the reputation of being the best dressed woman in London.

"You have had tea?" he asked.

"Ages ago. Shall we sit down here? I really have no scruples about leaving Sir Francis. He keeps fidgeting about with a blue book, and I believe he is going to ask a question or make a speech or something. Why are you not voting?"

"It is a minor question," he answered. "My vote is of no particular importance, and I happen to disagree most emphatically with both parties."

"Dear me, how unfortunate," she remarked. "Politics do seem such a muddle. I am quite sure that if I were a member I should join a party and vote as I was told. It must save so much trouble."

"I am quite sure you would not," he answered, smiling. "You would be up in rebellion in a fortnight."

"Well, we shall see," she said. "Once down at Bangdon I told you that I had tried most things in life—and now I have found one other excitement. If this fails I think I shall go into a nunnery. But for the present I am a politician.'"

He laughed outright.

"And your politics?"

"I am a progressive Conservative. I am looking forward to the General Election breathlessly. Remember too, please, that I am a person to be conciliated. I make no promises, but I might be inclined to canvass for any one whom I thought worthy. By-the-bye, why have you not been to see me?"

He was silent. He hated falsehood, and to tell her the truth was impossible.

"Many things have happened to me since we met last," he said slowly. "My little party has thrown me over. I am nothing but a parliamentary waif. Last week I was in Gascester looking after my little colony there, and the week before I took my wife to Paris for a day of two."

She raised her eyelids ever so slightly.

"Yes! Did you enjoy it? Paris always seems to me so deadly dull at this time of the year."

"Our point of view," he remarked, "would not be the same. We were both in reality trippers. We had never been there before. We saw the sights."

She yawned.

"Did you see them from a char-a-banc?"

"It was a matter of francs only," he assured her. "We had a victoria and a guide. My only private pilgrimage was to the graves of Abelard and Heloise. What an imaginative nation. Their tombs were fragrant with wet flowers."

"The Parisian proper," she remarked, "is the soul of romance. But to return to our discussion. Lord Sydenham has been talking to me of you. You are to be a feature of the new Parliament."

"He is very good," Strone answered doubtfully. "I am afraid that I may be a very unsatisfactory one.

"You anticipate trouble. Believe me that allegiance to party is not half so difficult as it seems at first to a person of your temperament. There is a certain amount of elasticity about our opinions concerning every one and everything. Besides, esprit de corps is a factor to be reckoned with. It grows every hour after you have once been admitted to the ranks of an established party.

"You are very consoling," he said, "and you do not talk either like one who has just taken up politics for a new fad."

She smiled—a little wearily, and looked away into the dark slowly-flowing river, speckled here and there with glints of sunshine.

"I think," she said, "that I must have lived for a very long time, for nothing which I take up comes to me wholly new. It is always a going back. Politics interested me once—when I was a child and my father was in the Cabinet. Today I seem to be only the reflex of other people's opinions. I trust Sydenham more than any one. I believe my cousin is the most brilliant and the most conscientious man of our party."

Strone agreed with her. Just then Lord Sydenham came out and threaded his way towards them through a maze of chairs and little tables. A sudden thought came to Strone. He watched Lady Malingcourt's face, watched her soft tired eyes, and the smile which for a moment transformed her face. His own face grew grey to the lips, a sick cold fear was at his heart. Lord Sydenham was freely spoken of as the next Prime Minister—Lady Malingcourt was confessing to a new interest in politics. They were obviously on the best of terms. He looked away and watched the shipping with fixed, strained eyes, struggling to regain the mastery over himself which he had for a moment lost. Their heads were close together. They were talking confidentially. What more natural or more suitable? His head sank a little lower. It was as though something were amiss with his heart strings. It was the complete realization of his colossal folly.

Her voice broke in upon his silent moments of agony.

"I am trying to induce Lord Sydenham to play truant, and I think he is almost persuaded. We thought of an impromptu dinner at the Carlton. Will you come? I can easily get a fourth."

He turned round.

"I am sorry," he said. "I am afraid not."

She looked at him curiously. The last few moments had left their mark.

"Is anything the matter?" she asked. "You look white."

"Nothing," he answered. "The merest headache."

"Then we will cure it," she declared gaily. "We will treat ourselves to the best dinner we can get, and go somewhere after. You can put off your engagement."

"I am afraid not," he answered. "I promised to take my wife out—if I could get away."

There was a moment's dead silence. Strone's answer fell almost like a bomb amongst them. At that moment an acquaintance touched Lord Sydenham on the shoulder and drew him a little apart. The two were alone.

"I am leaving town—very soon," she said slowly, "and I believe that I have engagements for every night until I go. I should like you to come this evening."

He looked at her with suddenly flushed cheeks, his strong face transformed by a sudden passion.

"What does it matter to you?" he said hoarsely. "You will have your cousin. I shall be in the way."

She looked him full in the face from under the shadow of her parasol, her eyebrows slightly raised, her lips twitching as though with the inclination to smile.

"Foolish!" she murmured.

Strone was ridiculously and speechlessly happy. Lord Sydenham rejoined them.

"It is all settled," she said, turning towards him. "We meet at the Carlton at eight o'clock."

"If it costs me my seat," Lord Sydenham answered gaily, "I shall be there."

"And I," Strone echoed. "At eight o'clock."

* * * * * *

Milly was waiting for him when he reached home, all ready dressed. She welcomed him noisily.

"Bravo!" she cried, "I'm dead tired of my own company. Let's go to the Troc., Enoch, eh?"

"I'm very sorry, Milly," he said awkwardly. "I can't take you out tonight. I'm going to have dinner with Lord Sydenham."

Her face fell at once. Her lips quivered.

"I've given you every moment I could spare lately, Milly," he continued hastily, "and we'll go somewhere tomorrow. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I can't help it this time. Are my things put out?"

"Yes!"

He hastened upstairs. In a moment or two she followed him.

"I ain't going to mind—much, Enoch," she said. "Perhaps I'll take Lucy to the theatre. Got all you want?"

He looked up with a sudden pang of remorse. Tears and voluble complaints would have been better than this.

"Everything, thanks. Yes, take Lucy and go somewhere. I shan't be late home."

She nodded, watched him dress, followed him downstairs, and whistled herself for a hansom. She held up her lips and he kissed her, hating himself for the impulse of revulsion which swept through him.

"Good-night, Enoch."

He looked back at the corner of the street. She was still standing there watching him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

They stood together under a tall palm, Lord Sydenham and Beatrice Malingcourt, and Lord Sydenham said something which had been in his mind for many days.

"I want you to tell me, Beatrice," he began, "what there is about this man Strone which attracts you so much."

The white feathers of her fan fluttered slowly backwards and forwards. She discovered that one of the ornaments on her bracelet had become unfastened, and she paused to secure it.

"Let me ask you a question, too," he said. "What is there about him which makes you so anxious to get him into your party?"

"Strone," he answered, "is a strong man and an earnest politician. He has practical and popular views on the great social questions which Government must face in a few years' time."

"He is a strong man," she repeated thoughtfully. "Yes! I suppose that is it."

"But you," he remarked, "have acquired a reputation for exclusiveness—for hyper-critical tastes as regards your associates, and especially your intimates. Now, Strone, from a man's point of view, is admirable enough—but from yours, I do not understand."

The feathers fluttered gently for several moments. She bowed and smiled to some acquaintances who were passing into the restaurant.

"Why should my point of view," she said, "be different from a man's? The small graces of life are very charming, but I am certainly not one of that order of women who place them above character. The man's social deficiencies are apparent enough. Yet I, who knew him when he was a workman pure and simple, am only astonished that they are not more apparent."

He looked thoughtfully into her impassive face.

"You are evasive," he murmured. "I wonder why?"

"And you," she answered, "have developed a woman's failing—curiosity. I wonder why!"

"I will ask you a question," he said, "which it should tax even your ingenuity to elude. Supposing that it were possible—would you marry Enoch Strone?"

The music rose and fell, the murmur of conversation around was like a pleasant babel. Lady Malingcourt remained impassive. Even Lord Sydenham, who was watching her closely, found her sphinx-like.

"If the other considerations," she said, "were in order, and if by chance he should desire it—why not? He is a man, is he not—like you others?"

"The other considerations! That includes, I suppose, caring for him?"

Lady Malingcourt became didactic.

"I have always considered," she said, "that a certain amount of affection is quite a desirable ingredient in matrimony. It is old-fashioned, I suppose, but what else is left for us? Modernity has spread to Balham, and is quite a craze at Forest Hill. I think that we must all become old-fashioned."

"I agree with you," he said gravely, "that marriage should be something more than a bargain. And because I agree with you, Beatrice. I want you to marry me."

"I absolutely decline," she answered, "to be proposed to standing up."

"Then let us find a corner somewhere and discuss it," he answered.

She shook her head.

"I wonder," she said, "if by any chance you are in earnest?"

"There is nothing in life," he answered, "which I have ever been so much in earnest about. I meant to wait until next session, but lately I think there has been a change in you. Tonight I decided that I would not wait any longer."

She looked at him thoughtfully. He was all that any woman could desire in a husband—rich, distinguished, handsome, too, notwithstanding his stooping shoulders and pale cheeks. She had quite made up her mind to marry him—some day—a year ago. Now the desire had gone from her. Strone's appearance was a relief.

"Come and see me tomorrow," she whispered. "I want to think about it."

Strone joined them.

"Only two chairs," he said, "but there will be plenty of room directly. I have ordered coffee."

She followed him. Lord Sydenham excused himself for a few minutes and lingered to speak to some friends. He had all the self-control of the carefully-trained politician, but he did not care just then to talk to Strone.

The chairs were in a secluded corner. Lady Malingcourt leaned back with a little rustle of silken draperies.

"My friend," she said softly, "I am going to ask you a peculiar favor. Do not speak to me for five minutes."

Strone nodded, lit his cigar, and looked out upon the gay throng of people. Lady Malingcourt from behind her fan watched him. Strone was well groomed and well dressed. There was very little in his appearance to distinguish him from the crowd of men by whom they were surrounded. A good tailor and innate good taste had secured him against solecisms—the small variations in his toilet from the prevailing fashion were rather a relief than otherwise. His hands were large and still a little coarse, but they were well cared for and well shaped. She studied his face, stern, hard, a trifle rugged, but full of power, relieved from any suspicion of coarseness by a mouth as mobile as a woman's, yet straight and firm. She judged him dispassionately, and found him good to look upon. No one could call him handsome, no one could pass him by without a second glance. She withdrew her eyes, but remained silent. A curious emotion had seized her. She felt younger, a curious longing stole into her heart for the hills at Bangdon, the soft west breeze, the song of the circling larks, the musical chirping of insects. Life seemed suddenly to have swelled into great proportions. She was frightened, nervous. She did not recognize herself. It was a moment of self-revelation, a single lurid sweet moment, the memory of which could never pass away. Then the crash of music, the murmur of voices, some trifling incident of her surroundings brought her back to the present. Only there was with her henceforth a new apprehension of things, the taste of life had suddenly possessed a sweeter and more potent flavor. Lord Sydenham's answer was no longer a matter of doubt. She sat up and sipped her coffee.

"I am ready," she declared, "to be entertained. You shall begin telling me what you have been thinking about. Have any of these fair ladies taken your thoughts prisoners?"

"I have not seen them," he answered. "I have been thinking of Bangdon."

He could scarcely have said anything more in accord with her own frame of mind. She raised her eyes to his, and he was amazed at their wonderful depth and color. The change came home to him, and his own pulses beat fiercely.

"Let us talk about Bangdon," she said. "Do you remember the first time I saw you? John brought you in to dinner."

"If I had known," he remarked smiling, "that there was a woman there I should have run for my life."

"Yet I do not think that you were shy. What a surprise you were to me. You wore the clothes of a mechanic, and you talked as even John could never have talked. Do you know, I think that you are a very wonderful person. It is so short a time ago."

He turned toward her, and his face was suddenly haggard.

"It is a lifetime—a chaos of months and years. Let us talk of something else."

"No! Why!"

"Don't you understand?" he asked fiercely.

(To be continued.)

Wife Willing Witness Against Husband Who Killed Her Father

DR JAMES W SIMPSON

MRS MARGARET HORNER

MRS SIMPSON

Riverhead, N. Y., Feb. 5—After Mrs. Julia Simpson had taken the stand last night and with supreme composure testified against her husband, Dr. James W. Simpson, who is on trial, charged with the murder of his father-in-law, the unexpected happened and it was decided that the case should go to the jury after all.

At the close of Mrs. Simpson's testimony, which occupied only an hour, the prosecution rested. Martin T. Manton, counsel for the defence, moved the court to dismiss the indictment and direct a verdict of acquittal on the ground that the prosecution had failed to prove that a crime had been committed.

This action had been generally expected and the impression prevailed that the court would uphold the contention, but Judge Kelly merely said: "I shall leave the case to the jury. The motion is denied."

With Simpson's wife and mother bitterly arrayed against him, he will find aid from an unexpected quarter. As soon as the defence is well under way Walter Selvage, of Brooklyn, and Charles Selvage, of Newark, both brothers of Mrs. Horner and therefore uncles of Mrs. Simpson, will be called to the stand to swear that on the day after the shooting Mrs. Horner told them it was an accident. Mr. Manton says the brothers are quite willing to testify along the line indicated and will be here for the purpose tomorrow.

Apart from the cold and deliberate bearing of the wife while on the stand another melodramatic tinge was given to the night session when Frank Wisnewski, the Polish boy who formerly worked in the Horner stables and who is admitted to be the only eye-witness to the shooting, was called to testify. Ever since the occurrence the boy has been confined in the Kings Park Asylum for the Insane, although it is said that most of the time he is entirely rational.

Escorted by Berand Wolf, of Brooklyn, who was to have acted as interpreter, the boy was brought into court and told to raise his hand for the oath. Instead of doing so he stood with his arms hanging loosely at his side and his eyes bent vacantly to the floor. A series of questions put by the interpreter caused no change in this attitude, although Wolf told the court that he had recently been talking freely with the boy about the case. Eventually Wisnewski dropped into the chair and covered his face with his hands, whereupon he was withdrawn as a witness.

Mrs. Simpson was called to the stand at the opening of the evening session. She was dressed in unrelieved black, but her veil was thrown back.

She is stout of build and of ruddy complexion, and her words were spoken in a clear and audible voice. As she reached the stand she turned her eyes away from Simpson, who buried his face in his hands.

Mrs. Simpson's testimony was in the main a corroboration of that already given by her mother. She laid emphasis upon every point likely to tell against her husband and was always ready to answer questions along that line before the court had a chance to rule upon the objections of opposing counsel.

She said that on the day of the shooting, when she warned Simpson to stop frolicking with the gun, he "broke" it and looked through the barrels to see that it was not loaded. She was also emphatic when she said that after Simpson had come down stairs with the gun the second time, when, according to the prosecution he had loaded it, his whole demeanor was changed.

"He had been hilarious," she said, "but now he became very thoughtful." After the shooting, she said, she asked Simpson why he had done it.

"What did he say?" asked the district attorney.

Mrs. Simpson hesitated for about thirty seconds; then she answered with apparent reluctance:

"He said it was only an accident."

When the cross-examination began Simpson raised his head and gazed sternly and questioningly at his wife, but she avoided his eyes. She admitted that she had gone to see District Attorney Furman four times the week before last to talk about the prosecution with him. She lowered her head while telling this until Mr. Manton said sharply: "Look up, please."

She admitted that when Simpson was parading around the room with the gun and with the dogs at his heels, she had joined in the frolic by beating on a pasteboard box, and that Mr. Horner, who was reading his evening newspaper, looked down at the dogs and smiled good humoredly.

"You love your husband, don't you?" asked Mr. Manton, suddenly.

"I do," was the reply, in a matter of fact tone.

"And you turned over to the District Attorney some of the memoranda in this case?"

"My mother did," said Mrs. Simpson, after a moment's hesitation.

Mr. Manton asked Mrs. Simpson if her husband and father had not engaged in conversation while playing the games of cards already mentioned. She replied quickly. "Yes, because the doctor cheated."

"What do you mean by cheating?"

"He didn't play fair and it made papa angry."

"Do you know Christian Coles, who sings in church at Northport, and didn't he stay at your house over Sunday?" asked Mr. Manton, but the question was ruled out.

"Do you know Chrissie, who works for Fox, the butcher?" he then asked. To this the answer was, "I do," and, without pressing this matter further, Mr. Manton said, "That's all," and Mrs. Simpson's examination was ended.

On cross-examination, Mrs. Horner admitted that she, too, had lately been in frequent communication with the district attorney's office about the case.

"You have no feeling against Dr. Simpson?" asked Mr. Manton.

"No," replied Mrs. Horner.

Mr. Manton tried to prove that Mrs. Horner and her husband had not spoken to each other from December 12 to December 22, 1905.

Wasn't your husband talking of getting a separation?" asked the lawyer.

"No, sir," was her reply.

One of the most effective points of the defence was made by Mr. Manton as an offset to the prosecution's allegation that Simpson possessed only one ragged summer suit of clothes at the time of the shooting, this being intended as an aid in the establishment of a motive for the shooting. The lawyer had a trunk brought into the court room, and from it he produced two suits of the cutaway variety, almost new, and a suit of evening clothes. He made both Mrs. Horner and her daughter admit that Simpson owned these at the time of the shooting.

Simpson himself will be the chief witness for the defence.

While the Kaiser has many fancy dishes put before him his favorite meal is a German beefsteak with mashed potatoes.