

# A Telephone Conversation

By C. D. MATHEWS



HELLO, Central! No. 918, please. Yes."

"Hello! Is Mr. Edward Peyton in the office?"

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Peyton? This is Miss Van de Veer—"

"You knew my voice, did you?"

"Thanks; but kindly refrain from such flattering remarks before your clerks—"

"Oh, you have a private office? I didn't know that—"

"What?"

"No, I hadn't thought of asking you to dinner, Sir Impudence; but since you seem to be hungry, I've several meal-tickets for the Rosemary One-Cent Lunch Counter down in Broome Street, and if you can prove yourself deserving charity—"

"Charity—"

"C-H-A-R-I-T-Y—"

"No, it doesn't spell love, Mr. Peyton. Your early education must have



been sadly neglected, and nothing betrays it so quickly as poor spelling."

"Have I called you up just to quarrel, then? Yes, and incidentally to ask if you won't come around to-night about half after ten for one of my Welsh rabbits."

"Thank you kindly, sir, you are very complimentary; but as rabbits are my specialty, having never failed me yet, humility on my part would be ostentatious."

"What did you say?"

"That you can't come? Why not?"

"Oh! You're going to the theatre, are you? I'm very sorry. Some other time, perhaps. Good-bye—"

"I beg pardon?"

"You'll come up after the theatre?"

"But I haven't asked you for eleven o'clock or later; I said half after ten, and it's not customary, I've been told, to invite one's self or to change the hour set by one's hostess."

"At what are you laughing?"

"Because I can't guess whom you hope to take to the theatre? I'm sure, Mr. Peyton, it's a matter of utmost indifference to me, though I suppose it's that awful Miss Dwyer—"

"Yes, I said awful. Of course, you know I meant awe-inspiring—'faultily faultless, icily regular' and the rest of it—"

"No, I didn't say 'splendidly null.' You said it yourself, and moreover—"

"But it's not Miss Dwyer? I'm sure I don't know who it is, then. Somebody equally uninteresting, I'd venture—"

"What? You think I'd call her more uninteresting?"

"No, Mr. Peyton, I don't care in the least to know about your old theatre, and as it may inconvenience you to come so far up-town after the play is over, I shall withdraw my invitation and—"

"What?"

"It isn't polite to withdraw an invitation without adequate reason? Certainly not. But I have a reason, Mr. Peyton."

"Pardon me? Did you ask if I am vexed at your going to the theatre? How perfectly delicious. And pray, why should I care with whom you go? I have told you repeatedly it is a matter of utmost indifference to me, and—and—"

"But you hope I will go with you? Upon my word! I suppose Miss Dwyer refused you—"

"What's that? You never asked her? And you meant to ask me all the time?"

"Well, I must say, Mr. Peyton, your assurance is prodigious. And then you said I was uglier and stupider than that—that Dwyer girl—"

"Yes you did, and—and—"

"No, don't try to persuade me. You should have asked me at the very beginning, and not made fun."

"You trapped me purposely into showing ill-temper. I can't go with anybody who shows such a lack of consideration."

"But you didn't show it."

"Of course, I don't know what you feel."

"But I can't see your eyes, Mr. Peyton."

"Oh, never mind my eyes."

"If I'd see you for minute you'd make me understand?"

"Well, perhaps you can come up for a little, but I won't—"

"The idea! Now you're going to the other extreme. You mustn't say such things."

"Of course I do."

"Come to dinner this evening at seven, and I'll tell you whether I'll go or not—"

"You want to ask me another question?"

"Perhaps you'd better wait until dinner for that, too, since it's so very important—"

"No, I shan't listen to you now, Mr. Peyton. I may this evening, though, and—come up early. In fact, you might as well take five-o'clock tea with me. I shall be all alone, and—"

"Oh, don't, Mr. Peyton, somebody'll hear you—"

"Please stop, and I'll say anything you want me to."

"No, no, no, I can't say that—I'm going to ring off—"

"Good-bye, Ned!"



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