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Probably Lady Maud's half-breathed invocation was not a sweetly phrased benediction upon that gracious weed tobacco.

Mr. Shallop did not smoke, and when Lady Maud, few minutes afterward, arose and opened the piano, he left Lady Pacewell and came to arrange the music, etc.

Lady Pacewell, who loved Jack more than she disliked tobacco, went into the conservatory to get a little of the former's company and the latter's smoke. Lady Maud, left alone with the lawyer, saw an opportunity and grasped at it.

"Sit down," she said, graciously. "I cannot bear any one to stand when I am singing. It is unfair to insist upon two inflections."

He smiled, told her that the listening and the standing were delights, and, thus encouraged, Lady Maud sang. It is needless to say she sang well—so well that Jack hovered near the conservatory door, and this being exactly contrary to what she desired, she left off suddenly, but continued playing.

Jack moved away again far out of hearing, and then, under cover of the slow, soft music, Lady Maud said, carelessly:

"What a long chat you had in the dining-room. I hope you did not bore each other?"

"No," said Mr. Shallop, smiling. "Mr. Hamilton never bores one; he is so original."

Lady Maud inclined her head in a languid assent.

"Business has charms for some of the human species, I know, but I didn't think Mr. Hamilton entered into its spirit."

"Neither does he," said Mr. Shallop; "we were not talking business."

"Stay!" said Lady Maud, a charming smile, "let me guess; was it horse racing?"

"No; there I am afraid I should be at fault," said Mr. Shallop.

"Then let me think, oh, the opera?"

"No," he said, laughing, "but you are getting warm."

"Theatricals of some sort?" said Lady Maud.

"Yes," he said, then paused.

He had not been asked to retain the matter as a secret, not a word savoring of confidence had been mentioned. It

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was not a legal matter or, of course, he could not speak of it.

"Yes, theatricals," he said, "were the subject of our conversation. Mr. Hamilton did me the honor of asking my advice respecting the benefitting of an actor and his daughters, persons in whom he has taken an interest."

"Yes," said Lady Maud. "Mr. Hamilton is good-natured and benevolent. He does a great deal of good."

"He does, indeed." He is generous to a fault," said Mr. Shallop, and he mentioned the instructions he had received anent the East-end charities.

"How good of him," breathed her ladyship; "and pray," she asked, with a charming smile of aimless curiosity, "might one know who these good people are?"

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Shallop, "a Mr. and Miss Montague, who are acting at one of the minor theatres—the Royal Signet."

At that moment Jack entered, and Lady Maud murmured, laughingly, "How romantic," commencing another song.

Jack stretched himself out in his chair, feeling very comfortable and happy. He had gone through a satisfactory conversation with his aunt, had assured her he always wore the chest preserver she had sent him, and was very careful about wet feet.

He had also prevailed on her to let him replace one of her carriage horses too fat and old for work, by a magnificent animal from his own stud; had sealed her objection with a kiss, and come back on good terms with every one to get wasted again.

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Lady Maud soon left the piano and came softly across the room.

Jack, with his eyes half-closed looked up.

"Why have you left the music?" he asked.

"Because I don't want to go to sleep," she retorted, and, pausing at his chair, leaned upon the top of it, looking down upon him and his upturned face.

As she did so her smile found no echo in her heart. A bitter, little gauffing thorn had crept in there, and was stinging her.

Looking down upon him thus, she realized what she would lose.

How tall he was; how strong! Mr. Shallop, an ordinary-sized man, looked a dwarf beside him. His face, too, was as handsome as the Apollo Belvedere's—in Lady Maud's eyes handsome—with its deep, pure eyes, well-cut lip, and crisp, chestnut hair. Oh, she could not, she would not lose him! And as the resolution flashed through her mind her little hand tightened upon the chair back and her breath came fast.

Jack looked up.

"It's too hot for you, my sweet cousin," he said, with his grave, gentle tenderness. "It is time you were in bed. I hear Mr. Shallop giving his premonitory cough of adieu. I will leave you free to go to your room," and he arose to his full height, smilingly.

"Going so soon!" she said. "Aunt, he will stay no longer, he says. Are you going to walk home?"

"Yes," he said, "and shall enjoy it; it clears one's brain before Bedfordshire. Good-night, aunt," and he stopped to kiss her. "Good-night, Maud," and he held out his hand.

Lady Maud drew him aside.

Jack, she said, looking him full in the face, "will you do me a favor?"

"Twenty," he said gaily, but with great earnestness, nevertheless.

"I want you to take us to the concert at Lady Bakewell's to-morrow night—will you?"

"You cannot!" she repeated, in a low voice. "You always refuse me now. You cannot! Where are you going, then?"

"I am engaged, dear Maud," he said, and a slight flush mounted to his cheek.

"To whom?" she said, half placidly, but with an undercurrent of deep mortification.

"There," he said, "as Shallop would say, 'that's a profound secret; I must not tell, Maud. Good-night! good-night!'"

She could not press him longer, and he got away, bowing over her hand as a prince might have done over a queen's.

Mr. Shallop and he parted at the gate.

When they were shaking hands, Jack said:

"Before we go I forgot to ask you to consider that matter of which we were speaking this afternoon in confidence."

"Oh, yes," said Mr. Shallop, rapidly weighing the advantages of confessing that he had already told Lady Maud, and deciding not to mention it. "Oh, yes, of course; I shall not repeat it now that you wish it to be in confidence."

"Mind, there is no mystery about it," said Jack, bluntly; "yet I would have the thing done quietly."

"I understand," said Mr. Shallop, and they parted.

Lady Maud went back to the fire and at last up to her room.

"I know where he is going to-morrow," she murmured. "I know as well as if he had confessed it. Oh, it is fearful to lose him like this. And I love him so; I am sure than I love

him now that there is a chance of losing him forever. But I will not—I will not. Who is this girl, this acting woman, that she should come between us and take him from me? Is she beautiful? Well," and she looked at the beautiful face that met her in the glass, "well, if eyes deceive not, his called me beautiful this afternoon. Is she young? Well, so am I, too young to stand tamely by and see a designing woman carry off the prize I have set my heart upon. I must see her. A painted, made-up thing; a stage beauty. All affectation, coarseness and low manner, with some trick of the voice, or eyes, or hands that has caught his heart. All men are idiots where women are concerned. He is the greatest and the simplest child could lead them. She is no child and will lead him from my side if I do not take care. I must see her. To-morrow? Let me think how I can arrange."

She thought for a few minutes and then knocked at Lady Pacewell's dressing-room door.

"Come in," said her ladyship, and her niece glided up to her.

"Aunt," she said, "I don't care to go to Lady Bakewell's to-morrow. You will go without me?"

"Oh, no, my love," said the affectionate lady. "Not without you; if you don't care to go we will stay at home."

"But I wish you to go," said Lady Maud, kissing her. "O, dear aunt, Lady Bakewell will be offended if you do not, and I will stay at home quietly, or well, perhaps I may take the brougham and call upon Mrs. Leigh. You are aware I have promised to spend an evening with her since her winter gout has arrived, and she will be so glad."

"Well, my dear Maud, it shall be as you wish," said the pliable aunt, and Lady Maud, having gained her object, kissed her aunt and returned to her own room.

"Yes, I will go and see for myself," she murmured, with a smile that was not a very sweet one, "see for myself."

What she saw and how it came to pass that she saw it must be reserved for another chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

"What is it, Mr. Tubbs, what is the matter?" asked Mr. Montague, in his off-the-stage low voice, as entering the greenroom he found that part in a sad uproar and confusion.

The centre of a group composed of ballet girls, imps, spirits of the deep, the pirate's band and a miscellaneous collection of carpenters, all talking at once and to no purpose, stood Mr. Tubbs venting his wrongs.

"Matter, sir? I should think it's enough to make a man's hair stand on end; it's too bad for slaves, it's—it's unworthy the endurance of a Briton, sir; 'pon my life, if it wasn't for the—"

"And he turned away."

Mr. Tubbs turned purple for a moment, then crimson. He saw that Mr. Anderson had got the better of him, any way, and with a swift movement he rolled the injured wig up into a ball and flung it full in the stage manager's face.

"There," said the little man, "you cut my wig up, you mean blackguard, and you shall have it."

Anderson was a fearfully passionate man, as well as a disagreeable one. As the wig struck him lightly he turned around and made one bound for the comedian, seized him by the

collar, and was, amid the shrieks of the ballet girls and the remonstrances of the men, about to strike him with one of the torches he had seized from the table.

But Mr. Tubbs, though small, was valiant. Thrusting up his arm as a guard, he hit out the other hand straight and swiftly, and Mr. Anderson received anything but a gentle pat upon the right eye.

In a moment the fiend in him leaped up at this fresh blow, and, by sheer superiority of strength, he threw Mr. Tubbs upon the floor.

What he would have proceeded to have done next, this chronicle can say not, for at that moment Miss Montague ran in, and, with a white face, stood before him, and caught his arm.

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for the respect I bear this establishment, sir—

"Never mind all that, Mr. Tubbs," said Mr. Montague, mildly, foreseeing that unless a line were drawn at an early stage of Mr. Tubbs's eloquence, he, Mr. Montague, should be barely able to don his pirate's costume for the first scene. "Never mind all that, but tell me, what is amiss?"

"Look here," said Mr. Tubbs, in deeply indignant tones. "Do you call that proper treatment for a respectable low comedian?"

And, with indignant scorn, he held out a wig—the wig of the character—torn down the back, very much bedraggled, and altogether a sadly wrecked and dilapidated piece of ornamentation.

"Well," said Mr. Montague, "dear me, what have you done to your wig, Mr. Tubbs?"

"Done to it! Me done to it! Nothing, except take care of it, sir. Look at that wig, sir; take it in your hand and tell me, sir, if you ever knew such a shameful piece of business. And there is none here as will act like Britons and tell me what mean blackguard did it."

Here a chorus—not as musical as the Greek ones—broke in and commenced informing him in fifty different voices of fifty different causes of the accident.

"Hold your tongues," roared Mr. Tubbs. "Why, you're worse than the gallery when it's got the contraries. Can't one of you tell me who did it? My only wig, too," he groaned, turning it around woefully. "This wig, sir, has always fetched a laugh; it was the hit of the farce, sir, and now—why, they will hiss me off the stage. Now then, which of you's going to tell me who did it?"

All the voices commenced again but ceased suddenly as Mr. Anderson, the stage manager, came in.

The silence was so eloquent that Mr. Tubbs glared significantly first at the wig and then at Mr. Anderson.

"Oh," said he, pushing out his head and winking significantly "that it, is it? Oh, that's the last gentlemanly way to pay me a grudge, is it? That's the proper thing, is it, to ruin

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man's wig and try to spoil me before the house? Now, you look here," he continued, walking up to Anderson, who had stood still during this half-audible soliloquy, but on seeing Tubbs approach, wig in hand, turned around sharply and bade the ballet girls go and dress, and requested to be informed why the duce that first scene was not being set. "Now, you look here at this wig, Mr. Anderson, will you?" said Tubbs.

"Well, a pretty thing, too. I hope you don't think of going on in that," said the stage manager, eyeing the ruined article with a certain amount of embarrassment.

"Oh, you think it's pretty well done for, do you? Disgraceful, eh? So do I. And now I'll tell you what, and his large eyes expanded ruefully. "I am not going on at all 'til the cad who knocked this up for me has begged my pardon, as like a gentleman as he can be."

"Oh," said Mr. Anderson, with a sneer, "that's to be it, eh? Well, better inform the manager. I dare say he'll be dreadfully cut up at Mr. Tubbs breaking his engagement. There are no more low comedians to be had now, oh no!"

And he turned away.

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A thrill ran through the small circle at her appearance, for they saw little of her usually, and a murmur of approval followed as with a heightened color she turned an accusing face to Anderson and said in low, but distinct accents:

"For shame! You forget yourself, sir!"

It was a sharp rebuke, and the man to whom it was administered felt it stingingly.

He loved the lips that uttered it, and would have given half his years to have won from the eyes, flashing so scornfully, one soft, kindly glance.

His face was distorted by passion and jealousy, and for a moment he was silent; then, as Tubbs got up, looking very shamefaced and muttering the most abject apologies and excuses to Miss Montague, he said, hoarsely:

"Ah, I ought to be ashamed of myself; you jump to his side directly; it is I who am to blame, in your eyes. But who struck the first blow? Ask him that."

And with a look of scorn and hate at the new humbled Mr. Tubbs, he strode off.

Mary looked with sorrowful reproach at Mr. Tubbs and murmured:

"Oh, how could you?" so sadly that the low comedian felt very much like crying, and, to save himself from such a breakdown, limped off—he had hurt his leg in the scuffle.

Mary, without a glance at the spectators, left the room quickly and entered her own dressing room. Having reached that sanctuary, her feelings found vent, as most women's strong emotions do, in tears. And yet she would have found it hard to explain why she wept.

Though gentle, Mary Montague was not a foolish, derisive maiden, and it must be confessed that a fortnight ago she would have hurried away from the scene just portrayed with a sigh, perhaps, but without all the intense feeling of shame which now filled her bosom.

Small things as well as great ones spring from small causes. Mary's unhappiness sprang from such a small thing as an elegantly dressed gentleman, with a handsome face and clear, ready-meeting eyes, who had chosen to haunt the theatre and bestow expensive bouquets by proxy.

(To be continued.)

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