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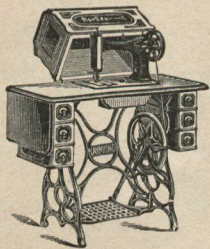
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going well—is quite a success?" says Mrs. Dyson-Moore, gayly. "Such a crush. One doesn't expect it in the wilds. As a rule country dances go all to smash. But this one is an exception. You enjoying yourself?"

"What a question!" says Ker.

It is a most ordinary answer, yet unfortunately it bears two interpretations—one for each of the women listening. To Hilary it seems a compromise; she had disdained to look at him, but she *feels* as if he had parried the question with a view to pleasing this detestable little Folly—this silly little Mrs. Dyson-Moore.

To the 'silly little woman,' it seems in her vanity a direct declaration that he is not enjoying himself at all! that he could not possibly do so, being separated for the moment from her!

She turns away, looking back at Ker as she goes and smiling coquettishly.

"The next is ours. Don't forget," says she, as she moves away.

CHAPTER XII.

"What you keep by you, you may change and mend;
But words once spoke can never be recalled."

"Thank Heaven!" says Ker.

"For what?" questions Hilary, who is not feeling as sympathetic as usual.

"For——" He checks himself abruptly. "Because we are once more alone."

"You must be tired," says she sweetly. "Do you really want to talk? Am I boring you? You have had a long journey, I know——"

"What nonsense!" says he. "As if I should mind a few miles by train." He has not altogether understood her. "Will you sit down here until the next dance begins?"

"It must be almost due now, and you have promised it to Mrs. Dyson-Moore."

"So I have." He would have added "worse luck," but civilization prevents him. "Still there is a minute or two left."

She makes no answer to this, and, the silence growing a little oppressive, he breaks fresh ground.

"How fond you all seem to be of fancy balls down here!"

"Not always! But once a thing is started, you know what a run there always is on it. It becomes an epidemic. It is worse than the measles. It catches all the county."

"We are certainly of the monkey tribe. Such imitative animals! But fancy-dress balls—they must be such a worry!"

"Not greater than others. Look at red hair. Let one woman preach a crusade on the becomingness of it, and all other women will dye their hair like mad. That must be a far greater worry than giving a fancy ball. Because, at all events, the latter permits us—at least *some* of the fortunate ones of us—to show ourselves at our best for once in our lives."

"Ah! *you* can speak!" says he, "being one of the fortunate ones." It is very ready and very delight-

ful, of course. But to Hilary, in her present mood, it savors too much of the man of the world, of the word in season—of, in effect, hypocrisy.

"I wasn't thinking of myself," says she, quite calmly. "I am, of course, quite out of it. I should have liked to array myself in gorgeous apparel,"—here she smiles—"but I hadn't a penny to do it with. I was thinking of Mrs. Dyson-Moore."

"It was very good of you," says Ker.

His manner conveys to her the belief that he thinks it very good of her to waste a thought upon her at all, but this does not satisfy Hilary. Why didn't he *say* it?

"Good of me?" says she; a sudden desire to make him speak has driven her to this direct question.

"Yes. Why should you? Others will no doubt take that task out of your hands. *Many* others."

He laughs, and a vision of Mrs. Dyson-Moore's *very* short skirts comes once again before Hilary's eyes. Is he laughing at her? She turns her eyes suddenly on his.

"Are you a friend of hers?" asks she.

"A friend? An acquaintance, rather, and," meaningly, "a guest."

"Ah, I see! Your lips are sealed."

"They would be certainly if there was any cause for sealing." He smiles and gives himself a slight shake. "Have we not had enough of 'Folly' for one evening?" asks he, with a rather comic smile.

"I don't see how I have been foolish," returns she, wilfully misunderstanding him. She gives him a little return smile, however, as she says it, which betrays her knowledge of his meaning, and at once he feels that 'peace with honour' has for the moment, at all events, been restored.

"You foolish! Never," says he.

"Not even—when—I——"

"Not even then. One can forgive you for keeping up the masquerade under our—peculiar circumstances."

He regards her steadily, as if wishing her to understand that there is meaning in his words—a desire to approach the delicate subject of the will. Hilary colors faintly, and trifles with the corner of her apron.

"I suppose you wanted to study me?" says he, a little darily.

"Ah! That was what was so unfair. I know it now. Why should I study you when you had no opportunity of studying me?"

"Yet I had. I had," says Ker, gayly. He laughs as if remembering.

"But not as if you saw me as my proper self."

"Your—*other* self was not to be despised. And how do you look when you are your proper self?"

"As I look now, of course."

"What! Do you *always* go about in a cap and apron?"

"Oh, nonsense!" Here they both laugh a little. "You see I have the advantage. I have seen you twice in ordinary clothes, whereas you have never seen me except in this." She pulls out a fold of her gown.

"*This* is very becoming," says he.

(To be continued.)

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