

a ghastly failure. It was cooked first rate, for Biddy herself was a good cook, and used only the best materials. But it was a short meal of conspicuous plainness, a dinner such as none of the guests had ever eaten in the Carslake house before.

Carslake concealed his annoyance only partially. His chagrin was beyond expression. When the meagre dessert of oranges and apples came on he made a bold plunge in order to save the situation.

"Any of you read a book named *The Simpler Life*?" he asked with an ironical smile, when the door was shut and he was alone with his men friends. They shook their heads, but one of them said he had seen it on the book stall, and thought it rot.

"O, it's good enough as far as it goes," said Carslake it admirable ease. "My wife got hold of it, and she thought she'd like to try the experiment of the plain dinners advised in it. Very good for the liver doubtless, but I think we must tell her we prefer the old style of thing and let our dignified look after themselves."

It was passed off as a prime and amusing joke in the dining room, but in the next room Biddy had a bad half hour, and when the end of the interminable evening came

she was conscious of nothing but a sense of complete rout. When Carslake closed the door behind the last guest he did not return to her with the usual speed to congratulate her on the success of the evening and she was too miserable to seek him. He came presently and stood in front of her.

"Well, did you like it, Biddy?"

"No, I didn't, it was ghastly, Tom," she said. "I don't want to rise to the higher platform. I'm content to grovel along as before. I nearly died of mortification."

"I thought you were in your glory," he said solemnly.

"And when that Marchmont woman condoled with me, and asked if the dinner was the work of 'oblige a lady,' I was nearly finished. O, Tom, don't let me try the simpler life any more I—I haven't the courage."

"If we'd been monsters of extravagance, Biddy," he began. "But we don't spend half our income. I think we'd better let the simpler life alone."

"I mean to," cried Biddy desperately.

"When I saw them look at that stodgy hyacinth pot in the middle of the table I suffered enough to absolve me forever from the simpler life."

