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The MASQUERADER

By Katherine Cecil Thurston, Author of "The Circle," Etc. Copyright, 1904, by Harper & Brothers

But she made no answer. For a second longer she searched for the violets, then as he bent to assist her she stood up quickly and laughed—a short, embarrassed laugh.

"How absurd and nervous I am!" she exclaimed. "Like a schoolgirl instead



"Then I am forgiven?" he said, of a woman of twenty-four. Who must help me to be sensible." Her cheeks still burned, her manner was still excited, like one who holds an emotion or an impulse at bay.

Loder looked at her uncertainly. "Eve," he began afresh with his odd, characteristic perseverance, but she instantly checked him. There was a faint suggestion of fear, in her protest.

"Don't!" she said. "Don't! I don't want explanations. I want to—enjoy the moment without having things analyzed or smoothed away. Can't you understand? Can't you see that I'm wonderfully, terribly happy to—have you—as you are?" Again her voice broke—a break that might have been a laugh or a sob.

The sound was an emotional crisis, as such a sound invariably is. It arrested and steadied her. For a moment she stood absolutely still, then with something very closely resembling her old repose of manner she stooped again and quietly picked up the flowers still lying at her feet.

"Now," she said quietly, "I must say what I've wanted to say all along. How does it feel to be a great man?" Her manner was controlled, she looked at him evenly and directly; save for the faint vibration in her voice there was nothing to indicate the tumult of a moment ago.

But Loder was still uncertain. He caught her hand, his eyes searching hers. "But Eve"—he began. Then Eve played the last card in her mysterious game. Laughing quickly and nervously, she freed her hand and laid it over his mouth.

"No!" she said. "Not one word! All this past fortnight has belonged to you; now it's my turn. Today is mine."

CHAPTER XXX.

AND so, once again, the woman conquered. Whatever Eve's intentions were, whatever she wished to evade or ward off, she was successful in gaining her end. For more than two hours she kept Loder at her side. There may have been moments in those two hours when the tension was high, when the efforts she made to interest and hold him were somewhat strained. But if this was so it escaped the notice of the one person concerned, for it was long after tea had been served, long after Eve had offered to do penance for her monopoly of him by driving him to Chilcote's club, that Loder realized with any degree of distinctness that it was she and not he who had taken the lead in their interview; that it was she and not he who had bridged the difficult silences and given a fresh direction to dangerous channels of talk. It was long before he recognized this, but it was still longer before he realized the far more potent fact that without any coldness, without any lessening of the subtle consideration she always showed him, she had given him no further opportunity of making love.

Talking continuously, elated with the sense of conflict still to come, he drove with her to the club. Considering that drive in the light of after events, his own frame of mind favorably fitted him with incredulity. In the eyes of any sane man his position was not worth an hour's purchase, yet in the blind self-confidence of the moment he would not have changed places with Fraide himself. The great song of self was sounding in his ears as he drove through the crowded streets, conscious of the cool, crisp air, of Eve's close presence, of the numberless infinitesimal things that went to make up the value of life. It was this acknowledgment of personality that upheld him—the personality, the power that had carried him unwaveringly through eleven colorless years; that had impelled him toward this new career when the new career had first been opened to

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him: that had been a way for him in this fresh existence against colossal odds; the indomitable force that had tramped out Chilcote's footmarks in public life, in private life—in love. It was a triumphant psalm that clamored in his ears, something persistent and prophetic, with an undertone of menace—the cry of the human soul that has dared to stand alone.

His glance was keen and bright as he waited for a moment at the carriage door and took Eve's hand before entering the club.

"You're dining out tonight?" he said. His fingers, always tense and numbed, continued to hold hers. The conviction that had driven him temporarily toward sacrifice had passed. His pride, his confidence and with them his desire, had flowed back in full measure.

Eve, watching him attentively, paled a little. "Yes," she said, "I'm dining with the Dramfelds."

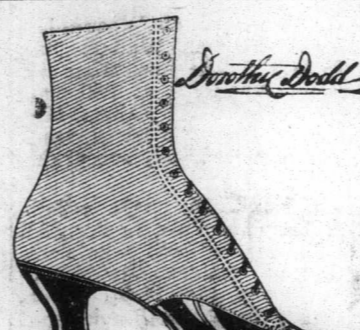
"What time will you get home?" He scarcely realized why he put the question. The song of self still sounded triumphantly, and he responded without reflection.

His eyes held hers, his fingers pressed her hand; the intense mastery of his will passed through her in a sudden sense of fear. Her lips parted in depression, but he, closely attentive of her expression, spoke again quickly.

"When can I see you?" he asked very quietly.

Again she was about to speak. She sighed forward, as if some thought unexpressed trembled on her lips, then her courage or her desire failed her. She turned back, letting her lashes droop over her eyes. "I shall be home at 11," she said below her breath.

(To be continued.)



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