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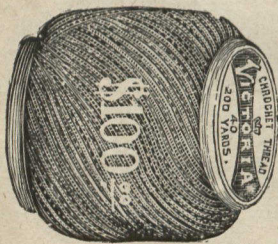
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A Mad Prank.

By THE DUCHESS.

"YOU think it was worth it?"

"Certainly I do."

"Well, then, I'll take back
that florin," says she, holding
out her hand.

He lays it in her pretty palm,
holding the palm as he does so.

"I don't see any hole in it," says
he, "and yet you promised to make
one in it, and hang it round your
neck. I am afraid," laughing, "you
are faithless."

"Did I promise that?"

"Beyond all doubt. I can see
you as you said it."

"Ah! then you did see me *that*
time?" She casts a little, quick
glance at him from under her long
lashes, and tells herself that she has
him at a disadvantage at last. "I'm
glad of that. One doesn't like to be
entirely overlooked, even when one
is a housemaid."

"And such a housemaid!" returns
he. If she had thought to over-
whelm him with reproach, she finds
herself mistaken. He is calmness
itself. He is evidently bent on noth-
ing but the payment of the florin and
pretty compliments. This enrages
her. "Still you promised, you
know," continues he, "to put a hole
in it, and hang it round your neck—
forever! Don't you remember that?"

"My memory is a mere rag,"
says Hilary. "I find it impossible
to keep it together. It isn't of the
least use to me, yet people insist on
saying that I ought to cultivate it."

"You *don't* remember, then?"

"I'm not sure—I have a mere
glimmering. Was it that day when
you told me to try and be a good
girl?"

"When was that?" asks he, col-
oring, however.

"Ah!" triumphantly. "Whose
memory is defective now?" She
stands back, smiling at him in her
pretty, irresistible way, yet with a
touch of disdain, defying him, as it
were, with her soft armory of eyes
and lips. "On the avenue again.
You recollect, surely! At the same
time you told me my hands were too
white, and you entreated me to bear
in mind that Diana was a good mis-
tress, and you begged me to—to"—
she looks down demurely—"to
desist from my fell designs on—poor
old Jim!"

Ker regards her with mixed feel-
ings. Perhaps anger is the strongest
of them, yet there is a touch of fas-
cination about her that makes itself
felt, and keeps him beside her.

"And yet you call your memory a
mere rag," says he with decided
sarcasm.

"Sometimes, sometimes!" airily.

"When you don't *want* to remem-
ber, I presume?"

"Not always. There," pausing
and looking down, "is one thing I
would rather not remember, and yet
I do."

"And that?"

"Was something you said."

"I can quite believe it. You have
already reminded me of several
things I have said, that certainly
under the circumstances you might
have managed to forget."

There is distinct reproach in his
tone.

"It was none of those. It was
worse, far worse. You said it at
luncheon."

"To apologize would be worse
than folly," says Ker. "I feel al-
ready that I have sinned beyond
redemption, and yet I confess to a
base anxiety to know my worst
crime."

"Well," resentfully, "I think you
needn't have told Diana that you
knew you would find it impossible
ever to like me."

"Look here," says Ker indig-
nantly. "I don't care *what* I said.
To be taken at a disadvantage like
that, and then be brought to book
afterward,—anything more unfair
than that—"

"It is you who were unfair. You
had never seen me, or thought you
hadn't, and yet you had made up
your mind to dislike me."

"I don't believe I made up my
mind to anything. I thought of
nothing but that confounded will
that placed us both in so false a
position. Why should I dislike you?"

"Why, indeed!" She pulls a
little fragrant branch off the shrub
nearest to her. "Well—don't you?"
says she. She does not look at him.

At this instant a light high laugh
resounds through the conservatory.
It is coming toward them. It is a
laugh once heard never to be for-
gotten. It is one of Mrs. Dyson-
Moore's 'properties.'

She has turned the corner now,
accompanied by a long-legged young
man with evidently (and this is a
sad reflection) more years than
brains. Because the years are few.

"Oh! you here!" says she to
Ker. "In this cosy corner! I
might have known it!"

Something in her tone is offensive
to Hilary. She draws a little aside,
and plays carefully with a bit of
foliage close to her.

"Your intuitive instincts are so
strong, that of course you would,"
says Ker, smiling pleasantly.

"Such a secluded nook!" goes on
Folly in her little click-clack way.
"Miss Burroughs, have you got the
monopoly of it?"

"For the moment," says Hilary
calmly. "My cousin and I are rest-
ing for the moment."

"Your cousin! Ah, true!" she
turns to Ker. "Fancy! your find-
ing a cousin down here."

"Not in the least more remarkable
than finding a cousin down *there!*"
says he, always quite pleasantly.

"Don't you think the dance is

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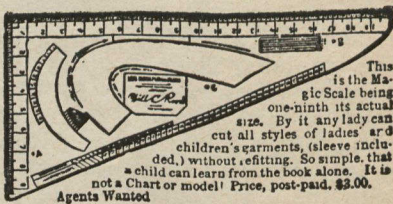
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