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THE QUEEN OF THE SEASON

"Oh, Vivien, if you knew—" he began, but she would not hear him out. "I do know that Lady Esselyn has poisoned your ear with her own base suspicions, and that she has some cause for them; but even if you had come to me at once—once, mind you—and said, 'Let me hear your version of the story; my faith in you is so great that I shall believe whatever you tell me,' I could only say to you, 'You are very young and apparently very friendly; I will do anything I can to serve you.'"

"To shield another? I guessed as much. And that other is—"

But Vivien would not fill up the gap. She only drew her engagement ring from her finger and offered it to him. Shaking his head he walked away to the window, and stood there, looking out for several minutes before he came back, and laid his hand on her arm.

"You are wrong, Vivien, though you do not think so. You ought to have trusted me fully, and helped me to grope through the maze, instead of leaving me to cut my way out alone; but I will not complain. There is a key to every enigma, and I will yet solve this one!"

"You have no right to undertake the task," she cried impetuously. "I give you back your truth, and forbid your interference."

"Because you are afraid of the consequence of my interference? Better to know the truth, however terrible, than to be on the shadow of corroding doubt all one's life. Do not forget that it is for Aymer's sake I took this upon me; there shall be no stain on the brightness of the name if I can prevent it."

"Will Aymer thank you for laying bare the past?"

A flush mounted to the baronet's forehead.

"To doubt that would be to doubt him, and I will never let myself do that. I have implicit confidence in his honor; if I had not I should have quitted England long since. It is only my knowledge of his impetuosity that has prevented me from going to him, and telling him point blank the history of that night, as related to me by the countess, and asking him to help me to discover what truth there was in it."

Vivien recoiled, and felt for a moment as if she wished him dead. Would he, indeed, do this? After all she had endured to shield and spare Aymer, would he go and horrify the unhappy boy with the tale the countess had whispered in his own ear? And must she, to clear herself, say to him, "It was to bring you money to pay off those who had you in their power that I braved the dangers of the streets, became the prisoner of the Andres, and placed my good name at the mercy of all who learned that I had fled the protection of my stepmother in the dead of the night?"

"But Sir Innis was speaking."

"Vivien, I shall return to Paris unless you can tell me anything that will render my journey unnecessary."

"I have nothing to say—no confession to make," she answered, drearily, and after waiting a while, as if hoping she would yet throw herself into his arms, and tell him all, she bade her farewell.

But, instead of replying, she suddenly grasped his arm, and he saw that her dilated eyes were fixed upon the door. They were no longer alone; but who was it that had entered so quietly and unannounced?

CHAPTER XLVIII.

After all, there was nothing alarming in the appearance of the strangers, whose almost noiseless entrance had brought such a perturbed look to the beautiful face of Vivien St. Orme. There were two of them—girls as young and, in their style, as lovely as herself; and though they were dressed with studious simplicity, there was a quiet elegance about their attire that would have given them an air of distinction, even if their demeanor had not been that of refined, well-bred women.

Sir Innis glanced at them without divining who they could be, till he heard Vivien say, beneath her breath, "It is—yes—it is Mary Deille."

Mary bowed as soon as she found herself recognized, and came forward, leading with her the fragile young creature who leaned on her arm, and glanced apprehensively from Vivien. She had drawn herself to her fullest height, and, half unconsciously, assumed a repellent air, drawing near, as if for protection, to the tall form of Sir Innis. He would have taken his leave, if a gesture from his betrothed had not entreated him to remain.

Mary, who, though still hearing about her the traces of recent indisposition, appeared thoroughly self-possessed, was the first to speak.

"Pardon this intrusion, Lady Vivien;

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It has been owing to a blunder of your portrait. I asked for my lord the Earl of Esselyn, and as he directed me to this room, I concluded that I should find him here."

"The man is a new servant, or he would have informed you that Lord Esselyn is not at home," answered Vivien so frigidly that Marie's eyes began to sparkle, and her petite figure became as erect, her air as defiant, as her ladyship's.

"Pardon me, again, if I ask whether this be the mere conventional term for 'He will not see you'? If so, it is necessary that I should be frank, and tell you that he will not be able to avoid the interview I seek. Unless he grants it here, it must take place at a lawyer's."

"Do you threaten us?" demanded Vivien. "It is not necessary, I assure you. Lord Esselyn, my brother, is not wont to avoid anyone, more especially when he has been seeking every-where."

Over Marie's face there passed a strangely troubled look when she heard this piece of information; but she made no comment upon it, and proceeded to tell him that she understood, and his lordship had really quitted this house, will you kindly tell me at what time his return is expected?"

"He is not in England. He has gone to Paris, led thither by a fancy that he should find you residing in the environs of that city. What affairs have you with him that cannot be with more propriety discussed with me?"

Mary regarded her doubtfully, and Vivien repeated her words.

"I invite you to speak. I am prepared to befriend and assist you, if your behavior satisfies me. Setting aside my relationship to Lord Esselyn, and remembering only that you are very young and apparently very friendly, I will do anything I can to serve you."

Sir Innis smiled approval of this speech, which was uttered not only more graciously, but with very pleasant earnestness; but the young girl, who clung to Marie's arm, murmured:

"She is his sister! Ah, spare her! Let us go away and wait!"

"Has there not been too much delay already? It kills me!" was the impatient reply; and in cold, resolute tones Marie addressed her late mistress.

"Lady Vivien, your offer is as generous as yourself; but will it not pain you too much if we reveal our errand, seeing that it touches upon the very heart of the matter? How will you bear that it is to compel him to fulfill a promise shamefully broken that we are here?"

"I do not understand," faltered Vivien, involuntarily stepping closer to Sir Innis, and snipping her hand in his, thus invoking his aid and support. "Before you bring any such charges against the absent, tell me who you really are!"

"I am Marie Isidore De Villefort, daughter of the Count De Villefort, and Marie Deille, his wife; and my cousin, Claire Eugénie Du Moray."

"Then you entered our establishment under an assumed name?" Vivien rather scornfully commented.

"It is true," said Marie, hanging her head. "I have borne that of my dead mother ever since I have been in this country. It was necessary to my purpose that I should not be recognized as the heiress of the De Villeforts. I am now at a loss to know what the purpose could be which induced a jeune comtesse of such a noble family to take upon herself the office of braving my hair and making my dresses!"

"Vivien with uplifted eyebrows, and Sir Innis with a frown, that it was not to gain by stratagem the justice my Lord of Esselyn withheld; and that I came to England with my blood fired with a passionate longing to avenge the wrongs of the timid, loving heiress of the De Villeforts."

Mary spoke so passionately, that Aymer's anxious sister was startled, but quickly shook off the impression.

"Mademoiselle De Villefort must have been brought up in a very romantic school, to harbor such extreme notions. Did she come to England armed with a dagger and a phial of poison wherewith to punish the silly boy who thoughtlessly flirted with her fair relatives?"

Claire, whose imperfect knowledge of our language rendered it difficult for her to follow the speakers, raised her sweet serious eyes, and gazed with innocent perplexity in them, at Vivien, who already felt ashamed of the taunts she had uttered.

"No," said Marie, deliberately. "I came neither to stab nor to poison; and I will be honest enough to avow to you Lady Vivien, that I have often and often regretted that I ever undertook to brave the dangers of the streets, as far as I am myself concerned, I deserve the sneers that have fallen from your lips; but, for your brother's sake, spare my cousin. Every word of censure you fling at her does but magnify his faults."

"Of course, you espouse the cause of your relative and condemn mine," said Vivien coldly. "It is natural, though it is not just. But I will not believe that my brother has given this young lady serious cause for complaint," she persisted.

"I see," retorted Marie, steadily, "you adhere to your expressed opinion that it has been what you English call a flirtation between Lord Esselyn and my little cousin; and in your eyes this would be but a venial offense. In mine it is inexcusable. No pure-minded girl amuses herself with whispering words or exchanging glances that should be given solely to the husband her friends have selected for her; no honorable man would woo a jeune fille solely for passer le temps. Our nation are sometimes called frivolous, but at least we are guiltless of this."

Vivien's head had drooped, and her cheeks flushed, for she felt that Marie's words conveyed some unpalatable truths; but setting these aside, she repeated her conviction that Aymer was too chivalrous to behave dishonorably to any woman.

[To be Continued.]

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OF INTEREST TO WOMEN

A Word About the New Skirts.

There is a trick about cutting the new skirts which everyone does not seem to comprehend, says a writer in an exchange. I saw a woman dressing the other day, and she pulled her skirt up in the middle of the back and pinned it to her bodice. Then she put on her belt. She did this to give that effect in the back, of the high belt which slopes down to the front.

Of course, everyone knows now that the belt was worn last year which was pushed down snugly in the back as well as in the front, are no longer worn.

Whatever else you do with your dress you must have the back as the woman did that I saw. The result was that the tight-fitting skirt was worn, and made another of the serious defects which this season's fashions cry out against.

"But," said the woman to me when I remonstrated with her, "I am not going to wear my belt in that old-fashioned way. I want it to slope down toward the front."

"Well, then, the only way you can obtain it," I said, "is to pin your whole skirt high up around your waist. Do not pin it up in the middle of the back and make it fall over in folds on the hip lines."

The trouble was the skirt was not cut correctly. You go to a good dressmaker, and she will tell you very quickly how to get that fit.

I wish I were an artist and could put in a pencil sketch just here that exact manner of cutting. It is very hard to do it in words, and it is not every dressmaker, by the way, who knows how to do it. A good pattern will show you, but even then you have to accommodate it very much to your own lines.

The skirt, as you know, fits tightly over the hips and abdomen. There must not be a wrinkle, and the skirt must go rather high in the back, there for you will find a seam very high in the back before you put it on its belt.

Do not cut it so that when you fasten it it droops from the waist line, but cut it as a man's trousers are cut, and then put your belt on. This gives the full so much sought after in the new skirts.

There must be as much of the back fitted as possible. The fit from hip to hip must be perfectly plain, and the lines there must be smoothed over and fitted with the same care with which you fit your shirt and your under-arm seam. No skirt that has not this high back and smooth lines is a correct skirt.

Table Dainties.

A Luncheon Dish—Whipped cream and prunes make a luncheon dish easy to prepare. Stew half a pound of prunes, after removing the pits and draining off the water, mash the prunes with a spoon and then add whipped, sweetened cream, flavored with vanilla. Fill small custard cups with the mixture and put them on ice until needed, when a spoonful of the whipped cream is placed on each cup. If the cream is colored pink or violet with coloring mixture the appearance of the dish is improved.

Danish Pudding—Put half a pint of cream and half a pint of milk into a saucepan on the fire, bring to the boil, then add one-quarter pound of sugar, and let it cook for ten or fifteen minutes, stirring it occasionally. Have ready peeled five medium sized apples, cut in halves, remove the seeds, and put them in the water very gently, and when tender remove the cores and fill up the hollows with jam or jelly; place them at the bottom of a buttered mould six inches in diameter and three inches deep. When the sugar is cooked mix with it before it is cold three ounces of very finely chopped almonds, sugar to taste and four eggs. Pour this on the top of the apples and steam the pudding for about three-quarters of an hour.

A Closet Like a Florist's Shop.

I have a friend who has just realized an ambition that she has nurtured for many a month. Ever since the violet craze struck her little world, she has coveted a violet closet—one hanging spot for gowns and wraps where they would be saturated with sachet sweets. But what discouraging quantities of orris and violet powder it would take to start this closet! Her wildest flights to perfume extravagance would not countenance the indulgence.

Then, as whispers of Christmas came to her from one source and another some weeks before the holidays, she took a bold step in the direction of gratifying her longing.

Here, there and everywhere the friends who usually remembered her at Christmas time were notified of her one desire in the gift line.

"If you want to please me, really please me," she wrote them, "let my present this year be either a pound of Florentine orris or a bottle of violet sachet. Neither one will break you, and either one will help to make me the most delicious Christmas souvenir I can imagine."

The idea of that violet closet took. There wasn't a woman appealed to who didn't hustle about to dispatch some dainty brand of sachet or the wholesome smelling orris.

For days before Christmas there came to my friend packages large and small. The rarest as well as the most inexpensive powders were contributed. Each pound of orris and each lot of sachet was gleefully hoarded as one more item towards the completion of the long-planned closet.

An especially interested acquaintance forwarded with her Christmas greeting several rolls of cotton batting; another sent a generous quantity of violet cheesecloth, so by the time the last token was on hand the sachet-collector realized with a thrill of satisfaction that her closet was to be no longer merely a fad, but a fact.

When the last note of thanks was on its way the closet was in preparation. It stood in the hall, just outside her bedroom door, a big, deep one, with two shelves at the top. One feature was a chimney which ran along the back, throwing enough heat into it to bring out every particle of sweetness in the sachet padding.

And how that closet was padded! Sides, top and shelves were covered with cheesecloth, and its interlinings of batting, heavy with orris and sachet. Just to open the door was like stepping into a florist's shop.

The favored pieces of finery which have found a place upon hooks or shelves are now catching the spring-like odor in every fold and frill.

For six months at least this violet closet should hold its own, and during that time my friend expects to revel in more all-round fragrance than she has ever known before.—Philadelphia Inquirer.

ACTRESSES IN TROUBLE

Julia Arthur's Costumes and Scenery Still Held by the Court—Ada Rehan Wont Play.

New York, Jan. 11.—Judge Nash, in the supreme court, refused to grant the motion made on behalf of Benjamin P. Cheney, Julia Arthur's husband, to vacate the attachment of \$5,000 secured by Theodore Moss, the proprietor of Wallack's Theater, against the Julia Arthur Company. A. H. Hummell, who is Moss' attorney, on receiving the attachment, promptly secured the costumes and scenery won by Miss Arthur and her company, which were in the theater.

New York, Jan. 11.—Miss Ada Rehan, who has been appearing in Shakespearean roles at Daly's Theater, has created much talk in dramatic circles by refusing to take part in "The Great Ruby," which Mr. Daly is to put on here next. "The Great Ruby" is a melodrama, which was popular in London, and Miss Rehan has withdrawn from the leading part.

ONTARIO MEDICAL COUNCIL.

Toronto, Jan. 11.—The following medical practitioners have been elected representatives to the Ontario Medical Council for the four years next ensuing: Drs. E. J. Bartick, Toronto; J. L. Bray, Chatham; L. Brock, Guelph; W. W. Dickson, Pembroke; S. S. Glasgow, Welland; J. Hanley, Midland; J. Henry, Orangeville; J. W. Lane, Maitland; A. A. McDonald, Toronto; W. McLaughlin, Bowmanville; K. W. Powell, Ottawa; J. A. Robertson, Stratford; W. F. Rourke, London; J. H. Sangster, Port Perry; P. Stewart, Milton; T. H. Thornton, Concession; J. A. Williams, Ingersoll. Collegiate representatives: Drs. W. A. Campbell, London; W. J. Douglas, Cobourg; W. B. Gekkie, Toronto; H. S. Griffin, Hamilton; V. H. Moore, Brockville; M. Sullivan (senior), Kingston; James Thorburn, Toronto. Homeopathic representatives: Drs. H. T. Campbell, London; W. J. H. Emory, Toronto; G. Henderson, Stratford; G. Logan, Ottawa; L. L. Lutton, St. Thomas.

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