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The MASQUERADER

By Katherine Cecil Thurston,
Author of "The Circle," Etc.
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The action was not without effect. Her soothing voice, her smile, her almost affectionate gesture, each carried weight. With a swift return of assurance he responded to her tone. "Right!" he said. "Right! We will enjoy ourselves!" He laughed quickly and again with a conscious movement lifted his hand to his forehead. "Then we'll postpone the advice!" Lillian laughed too. "Yes, Right! We'll postpone it." The word pleased him, and he caught at it. "We won't bother about it now, but we won't shelve it altogether. We'll postpone it."

"Exactly." She settled herself more comfortably. "You'll dine with me one night—and we can talk it out then. I see so little of you nowadays," she added in a lower voice. "My dear girl, you're unfair!" Chilcote's spirits had risen. He spoke rapidly, almost pleasantly. "It isn't I who keep away. It's the stupid affairs of the world that keep me. I'd be with you every hour of the twelve if I had my way."

She looked up at the bare trees. Her expression was a delightful mixture of amusement, satisfaction and skepticism. "Then you will dine?" she said at last. "Certainly." His reaction to light spirits carried him forward. "Now nice? Shall we fix a day?" "A day? Yes; yes—if you like." He hesitated for an instant, then again the impulse of the previous moment dominated his other feeling. "Yes," he said quickly; "yes. After all, why not fix it now?"

With a sudden inclination toward amiability he opened his overcoat, thrust his hand into an inner pocket and drew out his engagement book—the same long, narrow book fitted with two pencils that Loder had scanned so interestedly on his first morning at Grosvenor square. He opened it, turning the pages rapidly. "What day shall it be? Thursday's full—and Friday—and Saturday. What a bore!" He still talked fast.

Lillian leaned across. "What a sweet book!" she said. "But why the blue crosses?" She touched one of the pages with her gloved finger. Chilcote jerked the book, then laughed, with a touch of embarrassment. "Oh, the crosses! Merely to remind me that certain appointments must be kept. You know my beastly memory! But what about the day? Shall we fix the day?" His voice was in control, but mentally her trivial question had disturbed and jarred him. "What day shall we say?" he repeated. "Monday in next week?"

Lillian glanced up, with a faint exclamation of disappointment. "How horribly far away!" She spoke with engaging petulance and, leaning forward afresh, drew the book from Chilcote's hand. "What about tomorrow?" she exclaimed, turning back a page. "Why not tomorrow? I knew I saw a blank space."

"Tomorrow! Oh, I—I!" He stopped. "Jack!" Her voice dropped it. It was true that she desired Chilcote's opinion on her adventure, for Chilcote's opinion on men and manners had a certain bitter shrewdness, but the exercise of her own power added a point to the desire. If the matter had ended with the gain or loss of a tete-a-tete with him, it is probable that, whatever its utility, she would not have pressed it, but the underlying motive was the stronger. Chilcote had been a satellite for years, and it was unpleasant that any satellite should drop away into space.

ner. The crowd of horses and carriages had thinned as the hour of lunch drew near, and the wide roadway of the park had an air of added space. The suggested loneliness affected him. The tall trees, still bereft of leaves, and the colossal gateway incomprehensively stirred the sense of mental panic that sometimes seized him in face of vastness of space or of architecture. In one moment Lillian, the appointment he had just made, the manner of its making, left him. The world was filled with his own personality, his own immediate sensations.

"Don't bother about me!" he said quickly. "I can get out here. You've been very good. It's been a delightful morning." With a hurried pressure of her fingers he rose and stepped from the car.

Reaching the ground, he paused for a moment and raised his hat, then, without a second glance, he turned and walked rapidly away. Lillian sat watching him meditatively. She saw him pass through the gateway, saw him hail a hansom; then she remembered the waiting chauffeur.

CHAPTER XXI
ON the same day that Chilcote had parted with Lillian—but at 3 o'clock in the afternoon—Loder, dressed in Chilcote's clothes and with Chilcote's heavy overcoat slung over his arm, walked from Fleet street to Grosvenor square. He walked steadily, neither slowly nor fast, his attention fixed on the ground over the same ground was tempered by feelings he could not satisfactorily bracket even to himself. There was less of vehement elation and more of matured determination in his gait and bearing than there had been on that night, though the incidents of which they were the outcome were very complex.

On reaching Chilcote's house he passed upstairs, but, still following the routine of his previous return, he did not halt at Chilcote's door, but moved onward toward Eve's sitting room and there paused.

In that pause his numberless irregular thoughts tumbled into one. He had the same undefined sense of standing upon sacred ground that had touched him on the previous occasion, but the outcome of the sensation was different. This time he raised his hand almost immediately and tapped on the door.

He waited, but no voice responded to his knock. With a sense of disappointment he knocked again; then, pressing his determination still further, he turned the handle and entered the room. No private room is without meaning, whether trivial or the reverse. In a room perhaps more even than in speech, in look or in work does the impress of the individual make itself felt. There on the wax of outer things the inner self imprints its seal, enforces its fleeing claim to separate individuality. This thought, with its cresting interest, made Loder walk slowly, almost seriously, half-way across the room and then pause to study his surroundings.

The room was of medium size—not too large for comfort and not too small for ample space. At a first impression it struck him as unlike any anticipation of a woman's sanctum. The walls paneled in dark wood, the richly bound books, the beautifully designed bronze ornaments, even the flowers, deep crimson and violet blue in tone, had an air of somber harmony that was scarcely feminine. With a strangely pleasant impression he realized this, and, following his habitual impulse, moved slowly forward toward the fireplace and there paused, his elbow resting on the mantelpiece.

He had scarcely settled comfortably into his position, scarcely entered on his second and more comprehensive study of the place, than the arrangement of his mind was altered by the turning of the handle and the opening of the door.

The newcomer was Eve herself. She was dressed in outdoor clothes and walked into the room quickly; then, as Loder had done, she, too, paused. The gesture, so natural and spontaneous, had a peculiar attraction. As she glanced up at him, her face alight with inquiry, she seemed extraordinarily much the owner and designer of her surroundings. She was framed by them as naturally and effectively as her eyes and her face were framed by her black hair. For one moment he forgot that his presence demanded explanation; the next she had made explanation needless. She had been looking at him intently; now she came forward slowly.

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