

They sat down to luncheon—and the usual gossip and scandal became the theme of the conversation. Presently Cis sauntered in silent and moody, and ate his luncheon almost without speaking—although Mrs. Dalmaine, who took a pleasure in tormenting the ‘young bear,’ as she called him behind his back, made a point of addressing a great many questions and observations very politely to him, which Cis, who always suspected her of laughing at him, answered with surly monosyllables.

‘What do you know about this pianiste whom Juliet has engaged for the twenty-sixth?’ she persisted in asking him—having discovered, by heaven knows what arts, that the subject was a singularly distasteful one to Cis.

‘I have heard her play—she plays well; there is nothing else to know about her, I suppose,’ answered the master of the house somewhat savagely, for it was not the first time that his unlucky recommendation of Gretchen had drawn upon him the somewhat close questionings of his wife’s friend.

‘Well, you know, Mr. Travers,’ continued the lady, ‘as I was saying to Juliet, we really never have done your musical taste justice. I always thought, you know—you mustn’t be offended—that you were one of those matter-of-fact, soulless people, on whom music has no effect whatever—who could not tell the March in Faust from the Old Hundredth Psalm, for instance; and do you know, it is a delightful surprise to me to discover that you really can understand and appreciate musical talent—that there is *some* music that affects you. “Music hath charms,” you know, “to soothe the savage breast,”—this last with a delicate intonation of fine lady impertinence which Juliet, who was talking to Lord George did not hear.

‘I don’t know what you are talking about,’ said Cis, who knew he was being laughed at, and resented it, but had not wit enough to answer his opponent in her own weapons; ‘I don’t know anything about music, and I hate it!’ digging savagely into the cheese as he spoke.

‘In-deed!’ exclaimed the fair Rosa, uplifting her eyebrows with well-affected astonishment. ‘Then really, Mr. Travers, may I ask—allow me to ask *what* it is that makes you recommend Mdlle. Rudenbach so *very* highly?’

‘How should I know? I haven’t recommended her particularly. Juliet wanted a player, and I told her the name of one. Where is the occasion to make all these mysteries about it, Mrs. Dalmaine?’

‘No mystery!’ continued his tormentor playfully. ‘Oh, then I *know* she is pretty! and you knew her before you married! Oh, fie! fie! you naughty man!’ reproachfully shaking a finger at him.

‘Nothing of the sort,’ stammered Cis; and then got so red that Mrs. Dalmaine at once perceived that she had gone unconsciously very near the truth; and the idea tickled her so much that she burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

‘What are you two making such a noise about?’ said Juliet, looking up from her talk with Lord George at the other end of the table.

‘Oh, nothing, dearest Juliet!’ cried Mrs. Dalmaine, still in convulsions of laughter; ‘only—my dear—your husband is quite—the most amusing man—I ever met in my life!’

At which piece of information Juliet looked profoundly astonished, and was proportionately irate.

After lunch, when Lord George had taken his departure, and Mrs. Dalmaine was established in her friend’s barouche—for, having a carriage of her own, she generally managed to be taken out in Juliet’s—the little woman observed to her friend, as they rolled luxuriously down Piccadilly,

‘That quiet husband of yours is rather sweet upon the piano-player, my dear Juliet!’

No woman, however little she may care for her husband, likes to have that kind of thing said to her. Juliet felt very angry. ‘I think you presume upon your friendship with me, Rosa!’ she cried indignantly, flushing up.

‘Don’t fly out, Juliet. I always say what I think, and it is only meant as a hint to you. Bless you, my dear, we all have to come to it! Why, my old man has been dancing attendance on Lady Featherbrain any time the last eight years, and it doesn’t lie very heavy on my heart, does it?’

‘I don’t think you have any right to say such things about Cis,’ persisted Juliet angrily—‘especially to his wife.’

‘Very well, dear; I won’t say it again,’ answered Mrs. Dalmaine, with perfect good