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JEALOUSY; OR THE WIFE'S MISTAKE.

Charles Nelson, the eminent banker, sat at his breakfast-table reading the newspaper. He always took his morning's repast in his back parlor. The room was gorgeously furnished. The bright-colored flowers on the soft velvet carpet seemed to rise up at the slightest pressure; the heavy crimson damask curtains, hanging upon gilt bars, almost hid the larger plate-glass windows; the walls and ceilings were wonderfully and magnificently painted in fresco by an Italian artist; the furniture was of carved rosewood;—the breakfast set was of solid silver; every room in the house was appropriately furnished in as rich a style as the one in which the owner, the strictly moral bank-president, now sat. What cares he for the high price of provisions and fuels? What does he know of low wages, poverty, and want? of houseless wanderers and suffering humanity? For him are all the luxuries of life—houses and servants, horses and carriages, bonds, stocks, and mortgages, and everything that can please the eye or satisfy the taste.

Mr. Nelson was a large and finely developed man, in the prime of life, with a keen, cautious eye, and a pleasant expression of countenance; his knowledge of men, and his judgment and tact in financial matters, were remarkable.

The prancing black horses and the low easy carriage were at the door, and as Mr. Nelson prepared to depart for his office down town, his wife entered the room, and said:

'Why, Charles, couldn't you wait breakfast for me? must I always eat alone? Why do you hurry away from me?'

'Business, my dear—business,' he replied;—'I have an important engagement this morning.'

Thus saying, he kissed her forehead, and left the room. Mrs. Nelson was much younger than her husband; and though they had been married more than two years, she still had an unfortunate habit of continually worrying about him, and of being suspicious of everything that he did. She threw herself into an arm-chair, and if she had expressed her thoughts in words, she would have said, 'The world think I am happy because I am the wife of a rich man. I possess everything that I desire, and yet I feel miserable. Why has Charles done so much for me?—why does he give me so many costly presents?—Is it because he loves me?—is it because he wishes to bestow upon me all the comfort and luxury that his wealth can command?—I fear it is because he loves another. For several days he has hardly spoken to me. Whenever I attempt to retain him at home, he pleads his urgent business. I believe I have a rival.—He wishes me to go into the country to-day to our summer residence, and to-day is the anniversary of our marriage. I presume he has prepared some pleasant surprise for me. But why does he not go with me? He says he will follow me in a few hours. Some project is certainly concealed under this delicacy!'

Mrs. Nelson rang a small silver bell that stood upon the table, and a very pretty servant girl answered the summons. Breakfast was ordered, and, as she was leaving the room she dropped a letter.

'What is that?' asked Mrs. Nelson. 'A letter Mr. Nelson told me to send by the butler, and carefully conceal from you,' she replied.

'Indeed! let me see it,' and Mrs. Nelson took it hastily from the unwilling girl, and read to her dismay and anger, the superscription in her husband's hand-writing 'Francis Bradley, No. 23 Chestnut Court.'

'Not without reason,' she added; 'Jennet I will give it to the butler; and she placed it upon the table.'

'Mr. Nelson told me he should depend upon my delivering it without your knowing it,' said Jennet, 'and I am afraid he will discharge me if I disobey his commands.'

'Leave the room, I tell you; I will attend to it.' And as she went out, Mrs. Nelson started to her feet and paced the floor.

'What can he have to say to this person? Can she be a married woman or a young girl?—I determined to know who it is. After all, this is only an envelope. I can substitute another.'

Thus saying, she opened the letter, and read as follows:

'My dear friend,—To-day, at three o'clock, my wife will have left for the country, and I shall then be at leisure. Will you, then, have the kindness to meet me at my house, and at that hour, as you gave me reason to hope at our last interview? I have taken such measures and precautions that no one can disturb us. My nephew, whom I have entrusted with the secret, will introduce you with all possible privacy.—Fear nothing, but come as privately as possible, where you will be awaited with the greatest impatience by yours devotedly,

CHARLES NELSON.'

'A concerted meeting?' she exclaimed. 'I will expose the whole affair, and load him with shame and reproaches. She is to come at three o'clock, because I am to leave at two. Ah, Mr. Nelson, your schemes may not be so successful as you imagine. I will not leave the house. And that your accomplice, as well as yourself, may rest in perfect security, and without suspicion, I will expedite the letter as though it had not been intercepted. I think it must be to a married woman.'

Mrs. Nelson then enclosed the letter in another envelope, and directed it, 'Mrs. Frances Bradley, No. 23 Chestnut Court,' and rang the bell for Jennet, who quickly made her appearance.

'Hasten with this letter, and tell the butler to take it immediately; you need not mention to my husband that I saw it.'

Jennet received it with pleasure, and sent it to its destination.

About noon Mr. Nelson returned, and found his nephew, Arthur, busily engaged in doing nothing.

'My dear nephew, this affair is at three o'clock, you know. I hope I was not wrong in entrusting you with the secret. I rely as much upon you as myself. As soon as my wife has left for the country, you will introduce the person in question to whom I sent a note this morning.'

'My part shall be faithfully performed, and now, uncle, I want to ask a favor from you.'

'Well, anything you may ask, I presume I shall have no objection to grant.'

'I take advantage of this day of rejoicing,' continued Arthur, in a hesitating manner, 'to interest you in my marriage with Amelia Mowbray.'

'Arthur, my boy, I have no doubt that Mrs. Mowbray would be a suitable person for any other but yourself. She has polished manners and a respectable fortune, but she is much older than you; besides I have a great aversion to widows.'

'When you know her better,' observed Arthur, 'you will like her very much.'

'Then, too,' said Mr. Nelson, 'your aunt has destined you for your charming friend who is pursuing her studies at the institute, and who is worth considerable property in her own right; this, together with your being associated with me at the bank is a splendid prospect for you.'

'Dear uncle, I can only think of Amelia. She has promised me to present herself in person to-day, and intercede with you and my aunt. I hope you will speak a good word for me to my aunt, for she has never seen Amelia.'

'Well, Arthur, in consideration of your kind assistance in this affair of mine to-day, I will give my consent provided your aunt will do the same. Now put on your hat, and attend to that business at Ward & Company's I mentioned to you this morning. Remember and be here at three o'clock for that interview.'

Arthur then left the house, and Mr. Nelson went to his wife's room to hasten her departure. To his great surprise he found no indications of any preparations for a journey.

'My dear, are you most ready to go?' he asked, in a pleasant tone of voice.

'No, indeed,' Mrs. Nelson quietly replied; 'when one is about to leave for the country, there is no end to the preparations that are to be made.'

'You women are never ready at any specified time,' said Mr. Nelson, remembering his engagement; 'it is absolutely necessary that you should leave as soon as possible; the carriage is waiting at the door; your friends are expecting you, and we must not disappoint them.'

'Is my presence disagreeable to you?' rejoined Mrs. Nelson. 'You manifest a strange anxiety to get rid of me; and she looked with secret satisfaction at the clock, whose hands were slowly approaching the hour of three.'

'Upon my word, Mrs. Nelson, if my words are falsely interpreted, I will trouble myself no longer on the subject. If it please you, remain till to-morrow or next week; and with an angry look, he left the room with a determination to put off the interview.'

'Has it come to this,' thought Mrs. Nelson. 'A few months ago and who would have dreamed that this would have been my unhappy fate?—His hesitation, his desire of my departure, show that he no longer loves me. And I am to be sent into the country. My nephew is to introduce my rival. I will remain—I will meet them all and expose their treachery; and she thereupon went to the parlor, where she met Arthur, who started with surprise, and exclaimed:—

'Why, aunt, I thought you had left for the country; the carriage is gone.'

'I have changed my determination; I have postponed my departure.'

'Is my uncle aware of this new arrangement?'

'Certainly, but there is one person who is not informed of it, and I must let her know at once. It is Mrs. Gray. She was to go with me. I fear she will be disappointed, and, perhaps, offended. I, therefore, want you to inform her, and make any apology that may be necessary.'

'You must excuse me; I have important business to attend to now.'

Arthur suddenly remembered that he had yet to obtain his aunt's consent to his marriage, so he quickly added,

'But, my dear aunt, I will put it aside to accommodate you; I will go now,' and he left the room.

'Now, I am mistress of the field,' said Mrs. Nelson, 'thanks to my generalship. I have removed Arthur from the scene, and now must wait patiently for this Mrs. Frances Bradley.—She seated herself, and tried to read a book from the library, but she could not concentrate her mind, and so closed the volume just as the door bell rang; and a short stout gentleman, with a bald head, was ushered into the apartment.'

'Where is Mr. Nelson?'

'My husband is not at home. He said nothing about his return when he went out. Does he expect you?'

'Not me, but he was to have been here at this hour.'

'To whom have I the honor of speaking?' asked Mrs. Nelson.

'To an unhappy being. I am Mr. Bradley,' he replied.

'Of No. 23 Chestnut Court?' she eagerly inquired.

'Precisely,' he answered; 'but how happens it that you are acquainted with my residence and do not know me?'

'Because,' she replied, equivocally, 'I have heard my husband mention your name in connection with business.'

'Has Mrs. Bradley been here to-day?' he asked.

'Was she to come here?' innocently answered Mrs. Nelson.

'Yes; she was expected here at this very hour.'

'How do you know it?'

'I intercepted a letter this morning,' he answered.

'Just as I did.'

'The Address appearing suspicious to me—'

'Exactly as it did to me.'

'My wife not being at home—'

'My husband being then occupied in his office—'

'I opened the letter—'

'So did I.'

'And read it; shall I tell you—'

'No; I know it already.'

'Then, instead of exposing the whole affair,' said Mr. Bradley, 'as I seriously thought of doing—'

'And as I did,' exclaimed Mrs. Nelson; 'my blood boiled with indignation.'

'My hair stood on end!' rejoined Mr. Bradley. As his head was bald, this was decidedly a figurative expression, and Mrs. Nelson smiled as she contemplated his shiny pate. He continued, 'I shall let the matter take its course; for that reason I sealed the note, and am here to surprise the parties to it.'

'I have done the very same thing,' said Mrs. Nelson; 'but my husband is not now at home. I have never failed to love and cherish him.—Why should he treat me so?' and she almost shed tears.

'He visited me often,' remarked Mr. Bradley, 'on business, as he pretended, but I see now what was his object.'

'What said he to give color to his visits?' she asked.

'Do not speak of it,' he replied; 'you would laugh at my simplicity,' shall I tell her, thought Bradley, that under pretext of making her a present, her knife of a husband made me believe that he was desirous of purchasing from me my country-house.'

'The thought strikes me,' exclaimed Mrs. Nelson, 'that as this is the appointed hour, and they are not here, they may have met at your house.'

'Sure enough,' observed Mr. Bradley; 'I will hasten home and ascertain; and he thereupon, unceremoniously rushed from the house.'

In a few moments the bell rang, and the pretty widow Mowbray was ushered into the parlor. Mrs. Nelson had heard Arthur speak of this lady, but had never seen her; and it being near three o'clock, the supposed, of course, it was Mrs. Frances Bradley, and she boldly met her, and sarcastically said:

'I know who you are, and what brought you here. You wish to see Mr. Nelson; but I have the pleasure of informing you that he is not at home.'

'Then I would like to see Mr. Arthur, his nephew,' observed the astonished Mrs. Mowbray, as she quietly seated herself on the sofa.

Mrs. Nelson remembered that it was stated in the letter that Arthur was to introduce the individual, so she said,

'And I have the same pleasure informing you that Mr. Arthur is not at home.'

'Is this Mrs. Nelson?' blandly asked the widow.

'It is,' was the answer, with a tone and look that was intended to crush the bearer to the earth.

'I am delighted to hear it, and hope that my good fortune in meeting you here will afford me an opportunity of eluding your co-operation in the important step I have come to accomplish.—I was aware that my prospect of success would be slight should I find you here. I had reason for inquiring for your husband.'

'And I have reason also for presenting myself instead of him,' said Mrs. Nelson, sharply; 'and I cannot comprehend how a lady can thus renounce her modesty and so far lose sight of all that is becoming in her sex, as to take such a step as this.'

The widow gazed upon Mrs. Nelson with amazement; and then rising from the couch, said:

'When one has need of politeness, Mrs. Nelson, they should not be so liberal in giving lessons to others.'

Mrs. Nelson pointed to the door in a theatrical manner and remarked:

'It depends only on you not to listen to me.'

The offended widow marched to the door, turned about and exclaimed:

'I am rejoiced that your barbarous and insulting conduct has sunk you so low in my estimation that my just indignation cannot reach you! You will repent of this!'

And she slammed the door after her as she left the house. She had hardly passed the corner of the street when she met Arthur.

'Oh, Arthur,' she exclaimed, 'I am so glad to see you; but your aunt—'

'Have you seen her?' he eagerly asked.

'Yes, indeed; and another such woman I trust I shall never have the misfortune to meet again. She insulted me.'

'I can hardly believe it,' said Arthur, with astonishment. 'What the deuce could have been the matter with her? Upon my word such a reception does not look like gaining her consent to our union. I knew that she would be opposed to our marriage; but I did not imagine she could have carried her opposition to such an extreme.'

'She told me,' said Mrs. Mowbray, half sobbing, 'that she knew who I was and what brought me there.'

'Did you tell her?'

'No. I told her I was pleased, as that would render it unnecessary for me to explain the object of my visit. And she then used such language to me, I concluded she was insane or very ill-bred.'

'I am very much provoked that my aunt should have so treated you; but come, return with me, and I will oblige her to ask your pardon, and explain her conduct, or I will leave her house forever.'

Very reluctantly she went back with Arthur and found his aunt still seated by the window.—Mrs. Nelson had been regretting all the time that she had not detained Mrs. Bradley until her husband should happen in, therefore she was secretly gratified to see Arthur and the supposed traitress enter the room.

'My dear aunt,' said Arthur, leading the widow towards her, 'why have you treated this lady so strangely?'

'It was a misunderstanding,' was the reply.—'I was indisposed, harassed, and did not know her.'

'True this lady was only known to myself and my uncle, though she thought you might have expected the object of her visit, which was to—but since my uncle has not mentioned the subject to you, I will take it upon myself to ask your consent to my marriage with this lady.'

'To your marriage with that lady?' she exclaimed, horrified at the idea. And then it suddenly occurred to her that this was a concerted stratagem.

'I knew you would be opposed to it,' continued Arthur, 'and we hesitated to mention it sooner, as my uncle assured me you would refuse.'

'Well,' she replied, 'I have changed my mind in regard to your cousin, and if you really desire it, and since it meets the approval of my husband I give my consent.'

'Hurrah! What happiness my dearest!' exclaimed Arthur, seizing both the widow's hands and kissing her heartily.

'I hear my husband's voice in the hall,' said Mrs. Nelson, 'and I wish to be alone with him; you may step into the adjoining room until I call you.'

The happy couple made their exit as Mr. Nelson came in. He threw himself upon the sofa, and carelessly inquired if any one had called at the house during his absence.

'Yes, there was a certain Mr. Bradley.'

'Ah,' he said, 'I am not surprised at his visit—a little affair of business we had together; did he speak of it?'

'No; he is to call again.'

'At what hour have you fixed for your departure?'

'Do not be impatient. Perhaps you would like to know the cause of my delay? I remained to arrange a marriage.'

'A marriage?' exclaimed Mr. Nelson, starting upon with surprise.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Nelson, very composedly, 'the marriage of your nephew with a woman who came here to solicit his hand and to make personal application to you.'

'What was the name of the woman?'

'As she desired to see you, I did not think it necessary to inquire her name.'

'I think I know who it is. Arthur spoke to me upon the subject.'

'The door-bell rang, and the servant announced that Mr. Bradley was waiting in the hall.'

'My dear,' said Mr. Nelson, 'I wish to speak with him in private, if you will oblige me by leaving the room for a moment.'

'No, I wish to see him first. I am anxious to have an interview with him.'

'What business can you have with Mr. Bradley?' asked Mr. Nelson.

'Never mind; oblige me this once; step into the adjoining bed-room for a moment.'

'This is rather singular; however, I will do anything for you, my dear.'

As he left the room, Mr. Bradley entered, very much excited.

'Where are they,' he asked. 'I found no one at home.'

'I have them safe,' replied Mrs. Nelson triumphantly; 'my husband is in that bed-room, and your wife is in that adjoining room.'

'Let me get hold of my wife!' shouted Mr. Bradley, going towards the door in a threatening manner.

Mr. Nelson having heard this brief conversation, came in to demand an explanation, and inquired if Mrs. Bradley was in the house.

'Just as though you did not know it,' answered Mrs. Nelson, in a sarcastic tone of voice.

'Villain!' exclaimed Mr. Bradley, 'give me my wife—your accomplice.'

'If Mrs. Bradley is in my house, I will protect her, she shall not be harmed,' said Mr. Nelson, composedly.

'Wait a moment,' remarked Mrs. Nelson, as she went to the adjoining room. She soon reappeared, leading by the hand the widow Mowbray. 'Here, Mr. Bradley is your wife.'

Mr. Bradley started back, and then, with an expression and tone of great relief, said,

'This is not my wife.'

'What!' exclaimed Mrs. Nelson, almost bewildered with amazement, 'not your wife—not Mrs. Bradley?'

'I should like to understand this mystery and confusion,' said Mr. Nelson.

'It is for you to explain it to us,' said Mr. Bradley; 'your good lady was mistaken, but that proves nothing. You made an engagement with Mrs. Bradley to meet you here at three o'clock to-day. You wrote her a note.'

'I haven't written her a note,' said Mr. Nelson. 'I wrote one to you.'

'To me! impossible!'

'Isn't your name Frances Bradley?'

'Yes, but I do not call myself Mrs. Frances Bradley. Here, sir, is your note; you dare not deny your signature.'

'Certainly not; but I did not write that address on the envelope.'

'If you didn't, who did?'

'I did,' said the now penitent Mrs. Nelson.—'A fit of jealousy prompted me to change the envelope. Your name, which is that of a woman—'

'Except,' continued Mr. Bradley, 'that the last syllable is spelled with an "i" instead of an "e".'

'I supposed it was for a female. I opened it, and the contents confirmed my suspicions. With this belief, I re-directed it, and put off my journey to prevent the interview.'

'Do you not recollect, my dear,' inquired Mr. Nelson, 'the last month, when passing through the village of Brookdale, you were enraptured with a house and a garden that stood near the road? Mr. Bradley is the owner of it, and I wished to purchase it for you, on the eve of our wedding-day. I wrote him that letter, and was anxious that you should be away while I made the bargain and sale with him.'

'Oh, my dear husband!' she exclaimed, throwing herself into his arms, 'how wicked I have been—such suspicions—such unkindness, just as you were preparing for me so much happiness.'

'I hope this will be a warning to you,' remarked Mr. Bradley, reproachfully, 'never to mistrust your husband.'

'I, too, have done wrong,' remarked Mr. Bradley, 'in suspecting my wife, who is a model