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The MASQUERADER

By Katherine Cecil Thurston, Author of "The Circle," Etc. Copyright, 1904, by Harper & Brothers

Loder made no answer. Moving into the room, he paused by the oak table that stood between the fireplace and the door.

They made an unconscious tableau as they stood there—he with his hand, set face, she with her heightened color, her inexplicably bright eyes. They stood completely silent for a space—a space that for Loder held no suggestion of time. Then, finding the tension unbearable, Eve spoke again.

"Has anything happened?" she asked. "Is anything wrong?"

Had he been less engrossed the intensity of her concern might have struck him, but in a mind so harassed as his there was only room for one consideration—the consideration of himself. The sense of her question reached him, but its significance left him untouched.

"Is anything wrong?" she reiterated for the second time.

By an effort he raised his eyes. No man, he thought, since the beginning of the world was ever set a task so cruel as his. Painfully and slowly his lips parted.

"Everything in the world is wrong," he said in a slow, hard voice.

Eve said nothing, but her color suddenly deepened.

Again Loder was unobservant, but with the dogged resolution that marked him he forced himself to his task. "You despise lies," he said at last. "Tell me what you would think of a man whose whole life is one elaborate lie." The words were slightly exaggerated, but their utterance, their painfully brusque sincerity, precluded all suggestion of effect. Resolutely holding her gaze, he repeated his question.

"Tell me! Answer me! I want to know."

Eve's attitude was difficult to read. She stood twisting the string of diamonds between her fingers.

"Tell me," he said again.

She continued to look at him for a moment; then, as if some fresh impulse moved her, she turned away from him toward the fire.

"I cannot," she said. "We—I—I could not set myself to judge—any one."

Loder held himself rigidly in hand. "Eve," he said quietly, "I was at the Arcadian tonight. The play was 'Other Men's Shoes.' I suppose you've read the book 'Other Men's Shoes?'"

She was leaning on the mantelpiece, and her face was invisible to him. "Yes, I have read it," she said without looking round.

"It is the story of an extraordinary likeness between two men. Do you believe such a likeness possible? Do you think such a thing could exist?" He spoke with difficulty. His brain and tongue both felt numb.

Eve let the diamond chain slip from her fingers. "Yes," she said nervously. "Yes, I do believe it. Such things have been!"

Loder caught at the words. "You're quite right," he said quickly. "You're quite right. The thing is possible. I've proved it. I know a man so like me that you, even you, could not tell us apart."

Eve was silent, still averting her face.

In dire difficulty he labored on. "Eve," he began once more, "such a likeness is a serious thing—a terrible danger, a terrible temptation. Those who have no experience of it cannot possibly gauge its pitfalls." Again he paused, but again the silent figure by the fireplace gave him no help.

"Eve," he exclaimed suddenly, "if you only knew, if you only guessed what I'm trying to say!" The perplexity, the whole harassed suffering of his mind showed in the words. Loder, the strong, the resourceful, the self-contained, was palpably, painfully at a loss. There was almost a note of appeal in the vibration of his voice.

And Eve, standing by the fireplace, heard and understood. In that moment of comprehension all that had held her silent, all the conflicting motives that had forbidden speech, melted away before the unconscious demand for help. Quietly and yet quickly she turned, her whole face transfigured by a light that seemed to shine from within—something singularly soft and tender.

"There's no need to say anything," she said simply, "because I know."

It came quietly, as most great revelations come. Her voice was low and free from any excitement, her face beautiful in its complete unconsciousness of self. In that supreme moment all her thought, all her sympathy, was for the man—and his suffering.

To Loder there was a space of incredulity; then his brain slowly swung to realization. "You know?" he repeated blankly. "You know?"

Without answering, she walked to a cabinet that stood in the window, unlocked a drawer and drew out several sheets of flimsy white paper, crumpled in places and closely covered with writing. Without a word she carried them back and held them out.

He took the sheets in silence, scanned them, then looked up.

In a long, worthless pause their eyes met. It was as if each looked speechlessly into the other's heart, seeing the passions, the contradictions, the short-comings, that went to the making of both. In that silence they drew closer together than they could have done through a torrent of words. There

was no asking of forgiveness, no elaborate confession, on either side. In the deep, eloquent pause they mutually saw and mutually understood.

"When I came into the morning room today," Eve said at last, "and saw Lillian Astrupp reading that telegram nothing could have seemed further from me than the thought that I should follow her example. It was not until afterward—not until he came into the room—until I saw that you, as I believed, had fallen back again from what I respected to what I despised—that I knew how human I really was. As I watched them laugh and talk I felt suddenly that I was alone again—terribly alone. I—I think—I believe I was jealous in that moment!" She hesitated.

"Eve!" he exclaimed.

But she broke in quickly on the word. "I felt different in that moment. I didn't care about honor or things like honor. After they had gone it seemed to me that I had missed something—something that they possessed. Oh, you don't know what a woman feels when she is jealous!" Again she paused. "It was then that the telegram and the thought of Lillian's amused smile as she had read it came to my mind. Feeling as I did—acting as I did—I crossed to the bureau and picked it up. In one second I had seen enough to make it impossible to draw back. Oh, it may have been dishonorable, it may have been mean, but

him that his present difficulty was more impossible to surmount. 'I came here tonight to tell you something,' he began at last, 'but so far I have only said half!'

"Half?"

"Yes, half." He repeated the word quickly, avoiding the question in her eyes. Then, conscious of the need for explanation, he plunged into rapid speech.

"A fraud like mine," he said, "has only one safeguard, one justification—a boundless audacity. Once shake that audacity and the whole motive power crumbles. It was to make the audacity impossible to tell you the truth and make it impossible—that I came tonight. The fact that you already knew made the telling easier, but it altered nothing."

Eve raised her head, but he went resolutely on.

"Tonight," he said, "I have seen into my own life, into my own mind, and my ideas have been very roughly shaken into new places.

"We never make so colossal a mistake as when we imagine that we know ourselves. Months ago, when your husband first proposed this scheme to me, I was, according to my own conception, a solitary being vastly ill used by fate, who, with a fine stoicism, was leading a clean life. That was what I believed, but there, at the very outset, I deceived myself. I was simply a man who shut himself up because he cherished a grudge against life and who lived honestly because he had a constitutional distaste for vice. My first feeling when I saw your husband was one of self righteous contempt, and that has been my attitude all along. I have often marveled at the flood of intolerance that has rushed over me at sight of him—the violent desire that has possessed me to look away from his weakness and banish the knowledge of it—but now I understand."

"I know now what the feeling meant. The knowledge came to me tonight. It meant that I turned away from his weakness because deep within myself something stirred in recognition of it. Humanity is really much simpler than we like to think, and human impulses have an extraordinary fundamental connection. Weakness is ecstasism, but so is strength. Chilcote has followed his view; I have followed my ambition. It will take a higher judgment than yours or mine to say which of us has been the more selfish man." He paused and looked at her.

She was watching him intently. Some of the meaning in his face had found a pained, alarmed reflection in her own. But the awe and wonder of the morning's discovery still colored her mind too vividly to allow of other considerations possessing their proper value. The thrill of exultation with which the misgivings born of Chilcote's vice had dropped away from her mental image of Loder was still too absorbing to be easily dominated. She loved, and as if by a miracle her love had been justified! For the moment the justification was all sufficient. Something of confidence, something of the innocence that comes not from ignorance of evil, but from a mind singularly unprejudiced, blinded her to the danger of her position.

Loder, waiting apprehensively for some aid, some expression of opinion, became gradually conscious of this lack of realization. Moved by a fresh impulse, he crossed the small space that divided them and caught her hands.



"There's no need to say anything," she said simply.

I wonder if any woman in the world would have done otherwise! I crumpled up the papers just as they were and carried them to my own room."

From the first to the last word of Eve's story Loder's eyes never left her face. Instantly she had finished his voice broke forth in irrefragable question. In that wonderful space of time he had learned many things. All his deductions, all his apprehensions, had been scattered and disproved. He had seen the true meaning of Lillian Astrupp's amused indifference—the indifference of a variable, flippant nature that, robbed of any real weapon for mischief, soon tires of a game that promises to be too arduous. He saw all this and understood it with a rapidity born of the moment; nevertheless, when Eve ceased to speak the question that broke from him was not connected with this great discovery—was not even suggestive of it. It was something quite immaterial to any real issue, but something that overshadowed every consideration in her mind.

"Eve," he said, "tell me your first thought—your first thought after the shock and the surprise—when you remembered me."

There was a fresh pause, but one of very short duration; then Eve met his glance fearlessly and frankly. The same pride and dignity, the same indescribable tenderness that had responded to his first appeal, shone in her face.

"My first thought was a great thankfulness," she said simply. "A thankfulness that you—that no man—could ever understand."

CHAPTER XXXII

AS she finished speaking Eve did not lower her eyes. To her there was no suggestion of shame in her thoughts or her words, but to Loder, watching and listening, there was a perilous meaning contained in both.

"Thankfulness?" he repeated slowly. From his newly stirred sense of responsibility pity and sympathy were gradually rising. He had never seen Eve as he saw her now, and his vision was at the clearer for the long oblivion. With a poignant sense of compassion and remorse, the knowledge of her youth came to him—the youth that some women preserve in the midst of the world when circumstances have permitted them to see much, but to experience little.

"Thankfulness?" he said again incredulously.

A slight smile touched her lips. "Yes," she answered softly—"thankfulness that my trust had been rightly placed."

She spoke simply and confidently, but the words struck Loder more sharply than any accusation. With a heavy sense of bitterness and renunciation he moved slowly forward.

"Eve," he said very gently, "you don't know what you say."

She had lowered her eyes as he came toward her. Now she lifted them in a swift upward glance. For the first time since he had entered the room a slight look of personal doubt and uneasiness showed in her face. "Why?" she said. "I—I don't understand."

For a moment he answered nothing. He had found his first explanation overwhelming. Now suddenly it seemed to

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FORTY-FIFTH

ITALIAN ADVANCE DIFF

Very Heavy Storms and Keep Them

By Special Wire to the Couriers—The Italian advance in Tyrol hindered by the continuing which is exceptional. The mountainous member a season when so much snow on the hills. The mountain streams are dry at the end now deep and almost Italian troops are encountered and thick fogs interfered with long range storms were beating to men's faces in parts of the advance upwards is great. More elaborate defenses are confronting forces. The Austrian, protected by wide ditch entanglements; at other have been dug and covered ches of trees, and earth at the bottom. Into the course of a charge, of falling. The Italians, obliged to advance slow extreme caution.

One of the most effects of the Italian light troops of customs guards heretofore has been of mountain smugglers. They are now being utilized by many of their exploits, lated along the front, even being mentioned in of the day. On one occasion these guards crawled to Austrian outposts, and a session of information of to the Italian command, them refused rewards for

MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY HAM

Dr. Harvey Williams—Murderer of Suicide.

By Special Wire to the Couriers—Hamilton, Ont., July 2, 1904. A resident of Gravenhurst and killed Dr. Harvey Williams immediately turned the himself with fatal result.

The motive for the mystery. Williams had here a short time taking of Dr. Victor Ross, dentist in the north country. The doctor was out. He took in charge that three there had come to that he would there himself if he had fled with consumption, turned the doctor was sat down to wait and eat for a few minutes in the office, showing no young lady left and a later the doctor entered.

"Hello, doc," said Williams. The pair entered the closed the door. Fifteen five shots rang out, and of the house entering, the both men unconscious on

Many Ontario towns tion on the Dominion anniversary.

The Montreal Tramway is held up pending the in-cision.

Roy Young of Guelph d Juries received by being street car.

CONSERVATIVE M
 A meeting of the Cons the Township of Brantfo held at the Conservative Temple building, corner of and King streets, Saturday, for the purpose of elec man and sub-chairmen. vatives welcome.

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