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The First and Last.

By Charles Garvice.

Allan Fordyce leaned back in his chair and gazed at his canvas as he slowly and absently wiped his brushes. He was stopping, not because he was tired, but because the light was waning; this was generally the only reason why Allan stopped any day. The man worked hard. Why, he himself could not have told, seeing that he was unmarried, cared nothing whatever for money, and was not painfully ambitious.

No doubt he had aims and ideas, but he had never troubled to formulate them; and he worked because work seemed the best thing there was for a man who did not care for society and was not particularly sociable.

The waning light from the carefully arranged windows showed a by-no-means luxurious studio. There were no Oriental rugs, mock tapestry, Wardour Street armor, bronze lamps,

"Splendidly," replied Merton, throwing himself into one of the chairs and placing his glossy hat on a portion of the table which he first carefully dusted. "Had no end of a good time. I wish you'd been with me. Seriously, old chap, you ought to take a holiday; you are looking a little peaky about the gills."

"I'm all right," said Fordyce shortly. Probably he would have resented the speech from any other of his acquaintances. But he liked this boy—had got a berth for him, and had been of service to him in other ways; and the boy, strange to say, was grateful, and had grown attached to the silent man who had no other friend, appeared to require no amusement, and lived only for work.

"Got any engagement for to-night?" asked Merton, as he helped himself to a cigarette from a box on the table.



"What is that?" he asked, hoarsely, looking at the mark on her face.

or statuettes in satin-lined niches. There was an old carpet on the floor, some rough sketches on the wall, a coffee-making apparatus on a plain and rather rickety table, a few easy but comfortable chairs, and some well-worn artistic necessities in the way of lay-figures, easels, and posing tables.

Fordyce himself was as workmanlike in appearance as his room. There was nothing ornate about him, though no woman had called him plain. He was neither dark nor fair; his hair was cut to the ordinary shortness; his clothes suggested nothing of the artist or Bohemian, and when he removed his painting-blouse, looked like the clothes of any ordinary man.

As he wiped his last brush, there came a knock at the door, and in response to Fordyce's invitation, a young fellow came in.

"Hallo, old chap! At the grindstone still?" he exclaimed in the pleasant voice of a good-tempered, clean-minded youth—a voice which matched the frank face and light, curly hair of the speaker.

Fordyce nodded; he never spoke unless he was obliged. The young fellow came behind him, laid his hands on Fordyce's shoulders, and looked at the canvas.

"Been getting on first-rate, old chap, while I've been away," he said.

"Fairly," assented Fordyce; "but I'm going to stick now. Enjoyed yourself?"

Fordyce shook his head.

"That's all right. I want you to come round and see my sister."

"Didn't know you had a sister," said Fordyce.

"Yes, I have, and a good one at that. I didn't talk about her because—well, you didn't invite confidences, old man, and I'm not given to talking about Nell. I'm fond of her—she's the only sister I've got—and she married about a month ago. It was almost as bad to me as if she had died."

Fordyce looked inquiringly.

"She married Lord Claymire," continued Merton, with a certain constraint in his voice. "I dare say you've heard of him. Father was Claymire's Light Stout—made a million or two, got a peerage. His place was near my governor's vicarage, and his son—Nell's husband—met Nell at the country hop, fell in love with her, and proposed. As you know, we are as poor as the mice in the dear old church; it was a good match for Nell, and—she married him."

Fordyce looked up, again inquiringly.

"Happy?" he asked.

Merton frowned and bit his lip. "I—I hope so. I'm going to see her to-night; she only came back today. I want you to come with me. I wrote and told her how good you had been to me."

"Scarcely necessary, was it?" said Fordyce. "I don't think I'll come. I rarely go out; besides, I should be

de trop. You must have a lot to say to your sister."

Merton rose. "Yes, you will, old man," he said. "I told her I should bring you. She's all alone in London, and I want her to have one friend, at least."

"All alone with her husband," said Fordyce.

Merton bit his lip as he adjusted his hat carefully. "Well, Claymire's not much of a companion. He's a club man, and does a bit on the turf, and—I'll call for you at half-past seven."

Fordyce said neither yes nor no; but when Merton returned at half-past seven, Fordyce was in evening-dress and waiting for him.

"That's a good old chap!" said Merton. "I knew you'd come."

The hansom stopped at one of the big houses off Park Lane. There was no one in the drawing room when they entered and Merton began to walk up and down impatiently. In a minute or two the door opened and a girl came in quickly. She was a slight, willowy girl, with dark hair and grayish-blue eyes. Artists are quick, and Fordyce took in her form and face at a glance. She did not strike him as very beautiful at this, his first sight of her; but when she withdrew herself from Merton's brotherly but affectionate embrace and came towards Fordyce, something about the face—the expression in her eyes, a little droop at the corners of the delicately shaped mouth—impressed him strangely.

Her eyes dwelt upon him calmly, and she gave him her hand with a girlish frankness toned by a certain dignity.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Fordyce," she said, "and it is very good of you to come. Ernest has told me how much you dislike dining out, and I sympathize with you, for I myself dislike it." She turned to Merton, who stood looking from one to the other with a little anxiety in his face, for he wanted those two to be friends. "I am sorry Godfrey is not at home to-night," she said. He has been detained at his club. But perhaps Mr. Fordyce will not mind so small a party, and Godfrey may come in later. But it is quite uncertain; I never know when to expect him."

There were no accents of complaint or disappointment in her voice; but Fordyce saw Merton frown and open his lips, as if to make some comment; but he checked himself, and began asking his sister about her travels, taking Fordyce into the conversation, as if he were an old friend of both. They went in to dinner, talking as they went. It was a very pleasant meal, and Fordyce, though he spoke as little as usual, found himself listening, and now and again joining in the conversation as if he had known Lady Claymire as long as he had known her brother.

She had been to Italy, and she spoke of this—her first experience of the Continent—in a very bright and interesting way; but somehow Fordyce got the idea that she had not enjoyed herself—that she had not been happy.

"We'll just have one cigarette, Nell, and then come to you in the drawing-room," said Merton.

"You must not let Ernest hurry you," she remarked to Fordyce, as he opened the door for her. "I know that artists are fond of their cigars."

Fordyce, however, appeared satisfied with one cigarette. When they got back to the drawing-room, Lady Claymire was seated at the piano, touching a note or two softly. Fordyce looked at her as he entered. Her head drooped forward slightly, one elbow was leaning on the edge of the piano. The attitude struck him as rather a weary one; he noticed the clear pallor of her face, the little downward curve of the lips—he began to think she was beautiful.

"That's right, Nell!" said Merton. "Sing to us. My sister's a songstress, Fordyce."

She looked up. "That ought to frighten me," she said, with a faint smile—her smiles were by no means frequent—"but I will sing if Mr. Fordyce will promise not to expect too much."

Her voice was not strong, but it was well trained and very sweet; and there was something in it which im-

pressed Fordyce strangely.

She would have sat at the hall-door and footstool, Claymire said.

He was face. He which did look a gentleman, as if he had a room with Ernest!" i stared at Lady Claymire.

Lady Claymire approached him, and held out her hand, as if from one friend of smoking-cigar." H Fordyce the excuse also declined the house. "We'll v

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