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The Bread and Butter Miss.

PART II.

'No, on the contrary,' Despard replied, 'she was remarkably unremarkable; and he laughed lightly. 'It was rather absurd. I have seemed haunted by her once or twice lately, and yet nobody knows anything about her, except that her name is Florde.'

'Florde, that doesn't tell much,' said his companion. 'And not pretty, you say.'

'Pretty, oh, yes. No, not exactly pretty,' and a vision of Maisie's cold profile and—yes, there was no denying it—most lovely eyes, rose before him. More than pretty, 'Le would have said had he not been afraid of being laughed at. 'I don't really know how to describe her, and it is less than no consequence. I don't suppose I shall ever see her again,' and he went on to talk of other matters.

He did see her again, however, and it was, as will have already been supposed, at Lady Valence's garden party that he did so. It was a cold day, of course. The weather, with its usual consideration, had changed that very morning, after having been, for May, really decently mild and agreeable. The wind had veered round to the east, and it seemed not improbable that the rain would look in, an uninvited guest, in the course of the afternoon.

Lady Valence declared herself in despair, but as nobody could remember the weather ever being anything but highly detestable the day of her garden party, it is to be hoped that she in reality took it more philosophically than she allowed. Despard strode about feeling very cold, and wondering why he had come, and why, having come, he stayed. There was a long row of

conservatories and ferneries, and glass-houses of every degree of temperature not far from the lawn, where at one end the band was playing, and at the other some delighted beings were eating. Despard shivered; the whole was as ghastly. A door in the red house stood invitingly open, and he turned in. Voices near at hand, female voices, warned him off at one side, for he was not feeling amiable, and he hastened in the opposite direction. By degrees the pleasant warmth, the extreme beauty of the plants and flowers amidst which he found himself, the solitariness, too, soothed and subdued his irritation.

'If I could smoke,' he began to say to himself, when, looking round with a half-formed idea of doing so, he caught sight midst the ferns of feminine drapery. Some one was there before him—but a very quiet, mouse-like somebody. A somebody who was standing there motionless, gazing at the tall tropical plants, enjoying, apparently, the warmth and the quiet like himself.

'That girl in black, that sphinx of a girl again—by jove!' murmured Despard under his breath, and as he did so, she turned and saw him.

Her first glance was of annoyance—she saw her clearly from where he stood—there was no mistaking the fact. But, so quickly, that it was difficult to believe it had been there, the expression of vexation passed. The sharply contracted brows smoothed; the graceful head bent slightly forward; the lips parted.

'How do you do Mr. Norreys?' she said. 'We are always running against each other unexpectedly, are we not?'

Her tone was perfectly natural, her manner expressed simple pleasure and gratification. She was again the third, the rarest of three selves—the personality which Despard, in his heart of hearts, believed to be herself.

He smiled—a slightly amused, almost a slightly condescending smile, but a very pleasant one all the same.

He could afford to be pleasant now, for the little girl—she had given him with a good grace, a trace to her, a sense of regal airs and dignity; it was, too, to the timid self-consciousness of her first introduction.

'She understands better now, I see,' he thought. 'Understands the little country girl is but—ah, well—just a little country girl. Still, I must allow—and he hesitated as his glance fell on her; it was the first time he had seen her by daylight, and the words he had mentally used did not quite "fit"—I must allow that she has brains, and some character of her own.'

'I can imagine its seeming so to you,' he said aloud. 'You have, I think you told me, lived always in the country. Of course, in the country one's acquaintances stand out distinctly, and one remembers every day whom one has and has not seen in town it is quite different. I find myself constantly forgetting people and doing all sorts of stupid things, imagining I have seen some one last week when it was six months ago, and so on. But people are really very good-natured.'

She listened attentively.

'How difficult it must be to remember all the people you know,' she said, with the greatest apparent simplicity; indeed, with a tone of almost awe-struck reverence.

'I simply don't attempt it,' he replied.

'How—dear me, I hardly know how to say it—how very good and kind of you it is to remember me,' she said.

Mr. Norreys glanced at her sharply. 'Was she playing him off? For an instant the appalling suggestion at last took his breath away, but it was quickly dismissed. Its utter absurdity was too self-evident; and the expression on her face reassured him. She seemed so innocent as she stood there, her eyes hidden for the moment by their well-fringed lids, for she was looking down. A faint, the very faint, suspicion of a blush coloured her cheeks, there was a tiny little tremor about the corners of her mouth. But somehow these small evidences of confusion did not irritate him as they had done when he first met her. On the contrary. 'Poor little girl,' he said to himself. 'I see I must be careful. Still, she will live to get over it and one cannot be positively brutal for an instant or two he did not speak.

'Then, I never pay compliments Miss Florde,' he said, 'but what I am going to say may sound to you like one. However, I trust you will not dislike it.'

And again he unaccountably hesitated—what was the matter with him? He meant to be kindly encouraging to the girl, but as she stood beside him, looking up with a half-curious half-deprecating expression in her eyes, he was conscious of his face slightly flushing; the words he wanted refused to come, he felt as if he were bewitched.

'Won't you tell me what you were going to say?' she said at last. 'I should so like to hear it.'

'It's not worth saying,' he blurted out. 'Indeed, though I know what I mean, I cannot express it. You—you are quite different from other girls. Miss Florde, it would be impossible to confuse you with the crowd. That's about the sum of what I was thinking, thought—I meant to express it differently. Certainly, in the way I have said it, no one by any possibility could take it for a compliment.'

To his surprise she looked up at him with a bright smile, a smile of pleasure, and—of something else.

'On the contrary, I do take it as a compliment, as a very distinct compliment,' she said, 'considering whom it comes from. Though, after all, it is scarcely I that should accept it. The—circumstances of my life may have made me different—my having been so little in town, for instance. I suppose there are some advantages in everything, even in apparent disadvantages.

Her extreme gentleness and deference put him at his ease again.

'Oh, certainly,' he said. 'For my part, I often wish I had never been anywhere or seen anything! Life

would, in such a case, seem so much more interesting. There would be still things left to dream about.'

He sighed, and there was something genuine in his sigh. 'I envy people who have never travelled, sometimes,' he added.

'Have you travelled much?' she asked.

'Oh, dear, yes—been everywhere—the usual round.'

'But the usual round is just what with me counts for nothing,' she said sharply. 'Real travelling means living in other countries, leading the life of their peoples, not rushing round the capitals of Europe from one cosmopolitan hotel to another.'

He smiled a superior smile. 'When you have rushed round the capitals of Europe you may give an opinion, his smile seemed to say.

'That sort of thing is impossible, except for Bohemians,' he said languidly. 'I detest talking about travels.'

'Do you really?' she said, with a very distinct accent of contempt. 'Then I suppose you have not read—and she named a book on everybody's table at the moment.

Despard's face lighted up.

'Oh, indeed, yes,' he said. 'That is not an ordinary book of travels; and he went on to speak of the volume in question in a manner which showed that he had read it intelligently, while Miss Florde forgetting herself and her companion in the interest of what he said, responded sympathetically.

Half unconsciously, as they talked they strolled up and down the wide open space in front of the ferns. Suddenly voices, apparently approaching them, caught the girl's ear.

'Oh, dear,' she said, 'my friends will be wondering what has become of me. I must go. Good-bye, Mr. Norreys,' and she held out her hand. There was something simple and perfectly natural as she did so, which struck him it was almost as if she were throwing off impulsively a part which she was tired of playing.

He held her hand for a quarter of an instant longer than was actually necessary.

'I—I hope we may meet again, Miss Florde,' he said, simply but cordially—something in her present manner was infectious—and continue on talk.'

She glanced up at him.

'I hope so, too,' she said quickly, but then her brows contracted again a little. 'At least—I don't know that it is very probable,' she added disconnectedly, as she hastened away in the direction whence came the voices.

'Hasn't many invitations, I dare say,' he said to himself as he looked after her. 'If she had been still with Gertrude Englewood I might, perhaps, have got one or two people to be civil to them. But I dare say it would have been Quixotic, and it's the sort of thing I dislike doing—putting one's self under obligation for no real reason.'

If he had heard what Maisie Florde was thinking to herself as she made her way quickly to her cousin!

'What a pity!' she thought. 'What a real pity that a man who must have had good material in him should have sunk—to what I can't help thinking vulgarity of feeling, if not of externals—to such contemptible self-conceit and affectations! I can understand, however, that he may have been a nice boy once, as Gertrude maintains. Poor Gertrude—how our

hero has turned out! I must never let her know how impossible I find it to resist drawing him out—it surely is not wrong? Oh, how I should love to see him thoroughly humbled! The worst of it is; that when he becomes a reasonable being, as he does now and then, he can be so nice—interesting even—and I forget whom I am talking to. But not for long! No, indeed—'Mrs. Englewood's dowdy protégée," the "bread and butter miss," for whom the truth waits too much condescension, hasn't such a bad memory. And when I had looked forward to my first dance so, and fancied the world was a good and kind place! Oh! and she clenched her hands as the hot mortification, the scathing disillusionment, of that evening recurred to her in its full force. 'Oh, I hope it is not wicked and un-Christian, but I should love to see him humbled! I wonder if I shall meet him again. I hope not—and yet I hope I shall.'

The 'again' came next at a dinner party, to which she accompanied her cousin, Mrs. Maberley was old-fashioned in some of her ideas. Nothing, for instance, would persuade her that it was courteous to be more than twenty minutes later than the dinner-hour named, in consequence of which she not infrequently found herself the first arrival. This in no way, annoyed Maisie, as it might have done a less simple-minded maiden; indeed, on the contrary, it rather added to her enjoyment. She liked to get into a quiet corner and watch the various guests as they came in; she felt amused by, and yet sorry for, the little perturbations she sometimes discerned on the part of the hostess, especially if the latter happened to be young and at all anxious-minded.

This was the case on the evening in question, when fully half an hour had been spent by Miss Florde in her corner before dinner was announced.

(To be continued.)

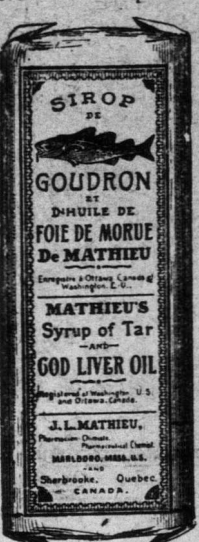
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THE FIERY FURNACE!

By WALT MASON.

With my old furnace I have tinkered through weary months of grief and groan, and I am scotched up and clinkered, my reason totters on its throne. And so I'm glad that spring is coming with balmy winds and skies of blue, when humming birds will be a-humming, and katydids their stunts will do. The furnace is a weird invention that makes men wish that they were dead; its whims, too numerous to mention, drive patient guys to painting red. On balmy days it earns its wages, and throws out fifty kinds of heat; but when a howling blizzard rages, it soldiers till you freeze your feet. It stores up heaps and heaps of ashes, and when you shake the blamed things down, they spill your whiskers and mustaches, and eke your silk hat and your gown. Around my furnace I have pottered and eked the man who made its grate was rounded up and neatly slaughtered, and buried in a basswood crate. And now spring harbingers are harbing, the wintry days are almost gone; and soon, my form in flynet garbing, I'll mossy forth to mow the lawn. When I'm above my mower crouching, an old straw hat upon my brow, you'll hear me ranting round and gouching about the same as I do now.

Walt Mason

Opening of Nfld. Branch

Among the visitors in the city today is F. E. Dench, of the Canadian Bank of Commerce, who is en route to St. John's, Nfld., to open a branch of his bank in that city. He is at the Sydney and leaves by the Bruce tomorrow. Mr. Dench for the past three years has been manager of the branch at Charlottetown, P.E.I., and previously was manager of the branch of the Canadian Bank of Commerce in New York city for many years. He is an experienced banking man and has been most successful in all his branches. The opening of a branch of the bank in Newfoundland by the Canadian Bank of Commerce is an important departure for the bank and is another evidence of the forward movement which has characterized this banking institution during the past few years.—Sydney Post, March 6.

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