

Eva would fain have continued to seclude herself, for she could not go down to the beach or into the town without passing the house occupied by the Dunfords. Some one or other of Camilla's young brothers and sisters would be sure to catch sight of her and spread the news, and it was difficult to decide which would be the more galling—to be treated like a wayward child, and graciously taken into favour again, or to be allowed to go her way as if she was a stranger.

Eva would have avoided either alternative by confining herself to the back garden, but there was a prescription to be made up at the chemist's, and Mrs. Penley having on one occasion narrowly escaped poisoning, was nervously anxious that her daughter should oversee the mixing of the various drugs.

However, Eva contrived to defer her walk till twilight, the hour when the Dunfords were gathered together for their evening meal, and it might be possible to slip by unnoticed.

This she contrived to effect, and ought to have congratulated herself, but, alas! for the waywardness of women! instead of rejoicing in her success, she cried behind her veil as she took her lonely way back to her mother's apartments.

Perhaps Philip had returned to London or transferred his attentions to one of those odious, simpering Miss Robinsons, or—

But now Eva's heart began to beat faster, for a manly step was coming up behind her. It drew nearer. Was it Phil?

Involuntarily she turned and found herself face to face with the earl.

Before she could overcome her confusion he was addressing her, beginning with respectful apology for the liberty he was taking, but adding that having just been recalled to town by his colleagues, he had not time to obtain a proper introduction.

Trembling from head to foot, Eva stood and listened, because she felt incapable of proceeding. From the neat little card-case Mrs. Dobbins had described he extracted a card, and put it into her limp fingers.

"It isn't quite the thing, I know," he said, "to trouble a young lady with details of one's own affairs, but how can I help it? I have always been an ambitious man, Miss Penley, aiming to climb to the top of the tree. For some years I have represented the firm of Bookson and Bookson, wholesale drapers, but could find no scope for my energies in the rag trade. So I have been looking out for other opportunities, and turned inventor. I am not fatiguing you?"

"Certainly not!" murmured his bewildered, but curious auditor.

"I saw that there was an opening for something new in the macassar-oil line, and with the aid of a perfumer, who goes with me, and a friend who will supply the cash if we find the brains, I am going to astonish the world with a new preparation for the hair. We shall advertise it tremendously; it has cost me a fortnight's consideration to evolve a taking title, and now we intend to embellish our advertisements with the photograph of some lady endowed with luxuriant tresses which have received additional beauty from our preparation."

"And you propose to ask me for my photograph? Mine?"

"I have seen you twice coming from bathing with your auburn hair hanging loose, and was seized at once with the conviction that such tresses, and, excuse me, such a face—"

But Eva stayed to hear no more. With a hasty "No, sir, it is impossible!" she fled, never stopping till she found herself in her mother's sitting-room.

Mrs. Penley was not alone; Philip Dunford was sitting with her; and Eva sank into a chair, almost hysterical with conflicting feelings.

Her lover saw that something was the matter, brought her a glass of water, and picked up the card she had let fall.

"Tomkins," he read. "Oh, have you promised to become one of the purchasers of Tomkins' patent hair invigorator, etc.? I had a chat with him in the reading-room last evening; not a bad sort of a chap. Told me all his aspirations. Seems to be up to every dodge for gulling the public."

"Mrs. Dobbins said he was a nobleman," stammered Eva.

"Foolish woman! His name is Joseph Earle Tomkins; that is all. Now, tell me, darling, what you and Cam have been disputing about. Nothing very serious, I hope. I could not come to you sooner for I have been knocked up with a wretched cold, and spent yesterday in bed."

Eva did make confession, but not then; and to this day she shudders and averts her head whenever she sees on a boarding those brilliant advertisements of Earle Tomkins' wonderful discoveries, that recall the time when she believed him to be a member of the British aristocracy.



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