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THIN ICE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

"In that case," suggested Klein politely, "perhaps I had better go and hurry Rutherford up?"

"Perhaps you had," she assented indifferently. In her heart she felt both annoyed and uneasy; under the cold fire of Klein's steel blue eyes her new-found sense of freedom withered and the suggestion of patronage in his tone brought the angry blood to his tone brought the angry blood to her face. She wished she had stayed upstairs until Mr. Rutherford had come in, but she had already learned to depend on his word and he had certainly said a quarter of an hour. The magnanimous attitude of Klein ceased to be a source of comfort, for, once in the man's presence, she felt instinctively that her former opinion of him had been the right one and the instant she tried to quiet her fears by assuring herself that she mis-judged a well-meaning man, a thousand memories rose to negative the

conclusion.

She waited, outwardly calm, inwardly anxious, until Klein came back. He hurried up to her at once, an expression of sympathetic concern

an expression of sympathetic concern upon his face.

"I am afraid that we have been blaming Rutherford unjustly," he said. "It appears that he has been taken suddenly ill, a fainting spell, I believe. Of course he will be quite unable to return to-night."

Margaret, looking into the man's mask-like face, felt her own face begin to whiten. She had tasted freedom, then, only to be shown more clearly the reality of her servitude.

"I chall be most pleased to drive

"I shall be most pleased to drive you home," continued Klein's even

Margaret felt that he had won. How could she refuse his most natural offer without at once making an enemy of him and exposing herself to the wondering comments of her friends? Yet she dreaded inexpressibly the idea of the drive alone with him. She glanced about the room in despair, but there was no one there whom she could with propriety place before Klein. If she refused she must give a reason and her reason

must give a reason and her reason was one that she could not give.

"I—" she faltered—and then, looking up she saw Rutherford standing in the doorway.

Klein saw him, too. His readymade smile died out, but Margaret, glancing quickly at his face, saw nothing there save a natural surprise. His other feelings, if he had any, were evidently under good control. Without turning down the collar of his coat, which was high enough to almost hide his face, Rutherford came across to them. across to them.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," he said to Margaret. "I was detained by a slight accident."
"Yes?" Her tone was enquiring.

Klein, too, seemed to wait for the

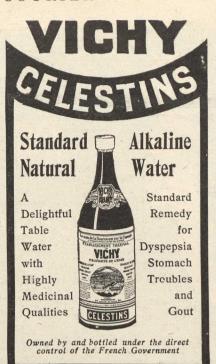
answer.
"The harness was mislaid. If you are ready now, Miss Manners—"

She rose immediately.
"I felt," she said lightly, "like the French king who was almost obliged to wait—only much more so. It was inconsiderate of the harness to lose itself.'

itself."

They left Klein standing by the empty chair, and, making their adieux, passed out. Peter, shouting a merry good-night, gathered up the lines and the released horses sprang away. For the first few moments neither spoke, but as the horses dashed through the gates and narrowly missed an upset at the turning, Margaret leaned forward and quietly took the lines from Rutherford's hands.

"Thanks," said Peter, leaning back.





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