

THIN ICE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

beautiful. If Venice is anything like that I should love it."

"It is like that and you would love it. It would suit you. Now that I think of it," reflectively, "that is what your hair is—Venetian."

Margaret looked at him coldly and he knew that he had made a mistake. What had really been but a too outspoken thought she had taken as a clumsy and uncalled-for attempt at compliment.

"If you mean that it is bleached," she said calmly, "it isn't."

Peter laughed.

"I had forgotten that part of it and I beg your pardon for my inexcusable remark. But when you visit Europe don't forget Venice. I imagine you might find memories there of some previous existence."

He had intended the words as the lightest banter merely, an easy way of bridging an awkward pause, but to his surprise she looked quite serious.

"Do you believe in that?" she asked.

"In what, Miss Manners?"

"In what you said, that those strange memories and premonitions people have and cannot account for are really dimmest recollections of things that actually happened—some-time?"

"I don't know that I do," truthfully; "in fact, I do not think that any theory that has ever been advanced explains or accounts for them in the very least."

"Because," went on Margaret simply, "I had one of those feelings when I saw you in the hall last night."

"Did you?" Peter was now vividly interested. "How nice—I mean I hope it was nice. Won't you tell me about it?"

"Oh, there is very little to tell, just an impression, so real that it startled me, of having been through a similar experience; that I had seen you standing there just as you were with the snow thick on your coat, and the little pools of water and," with a mischievous smile, "the handkerchief. I knew quite well the words you were going to speak before you spoke them."

"It is curious. I have had just such experiences; everyone has, I expect. By rights, though, I should have said something very memorable, shouldn't I?"

"Yes. But the most curious thing of all is that these presentiments are nearly always of trivial things that do not seem to mean anything."

"I am not trivial," said Peter stoutly, "and I always mean a great deal."

"It is sad to be misunderstood," said Margaret smiling, "but I assure you that if this were my 'day' your opinion of your own importance would be justified, for in Banbridge a gentleman caller is looked upon with envy and respect."

"This is my day," said Peter. "Tomorrow I go home."

Margaret looked politely interested. "I have no doubt you find Banbridge dull," she remarked, "and, before I forget, let me give you this letter which must have slipped from your overcoat."

This was the moment for which she had been gathering her courage, and her air of detached carelessness was quite perfect as she handed him the letter which lay on a table near by and began serenely to pour the tea. Her nervousness had evaporated and she felt nothing save a very feminine curiosity to see how he would meet the situation.

Peter took the letter indifferently but when his eye caught the address and he realised that it was his freedom he held in his hand, his sense

of relief was so great that for the moment he could appreciate nothing else. Margaret, watching under her eyelashes, saw the joy in his face and naturally mistook the cause.

"I hope," her voice was quite cool and impersonal, "that the letter was not important?"

"Oh, very important indeed," exclaimed Peter, still looking delightedly at the envelope. "At least, I mean, of course, it was not important at all."

Margaret stared politely.

"I mean," stammered Peter, now very red, "that it didn't make any difference, you know, the posting I mean."

"Oh!" said Margaret coldly, "I thought that perhaps I should have asked Tom to drop it in the post for you."

Peter's face grew white. "I'm so glad you didn't," he said impulsively, then, in stammering explanation, "I—I prefer to mail it myself."

Margaret nodded sympathetically. It was quite natural that he should wish to post his own love-letters. She felt suddenly tired and out of sorts. It mattered nothing to her that he should make such a fuss over his recovered letter, only—only he need not have shown it quite so plainly. She felt that she had been entirely too friendly with him after the deception he had practised on her last night—making her so ridiculous! Her manner grew distinctly colder.

Peter, too elated by his reprieve to notice the change, chattered on, and not until her silence became most pronounced did he realise that he had already prolonged his call more than was customary or even permissible.

"You will think me a savage," Miss Manners, he remarked, "but I have been enjoying myself so much that I had forgotten the conventionalities. I know I ought to have gone away home long ago."

The warmth of his tone and his smile made it hard for her to preserve her formal coldness. She permitted a slight thaw—after all, he was going away to-morrow.

She rose with him politely, saying in a decently regretful voice.

"I am sorry that you are leaving town so soon. There is to be a grand sleighing party on Thursday, it might have been an interesting experience for you—as a survival of an ancient custom, I mean," she added smiling.

Peter was in somewhat of a predicament. Needless to say, since the recovery of the letter, his plans had undergone a radical transformation. He had no intention whatever of returning to Montreal on the morrow but how to convey this to her with no shadow of reason for the sudden change was a puzzle.

"An old-fashioned sleighing party," he said; "how enticing! I should love to go. And it is just possible that I may not leave here to-morrow. You see, I am much interested in—

in mines?"

"Mines?" in surprise.

"Yes. Leverage you know, is quite an authority on mining."

"I didn't know," said Margaret.

"If I should happen to be here," said Peter, "how could I get an invitation?"

"Oh, Mrs. Leverage could invite you, or for that matter I will invite you now."

"Thank you," began Peter eagerly, but could say no more, for just then the door-bell rang and the feet of Martha could be heard slip-slapping along the hall. "I must go," he said, "it is unpardonable to have stayed so long."

TO BE CONTINUED.



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