

I can however, appreciate romance in others, though I am aware that you think even that impossible."

Mr. Henshall sighed. He would not stupidly if Lena would feel interested in his own brief, pointless romance.

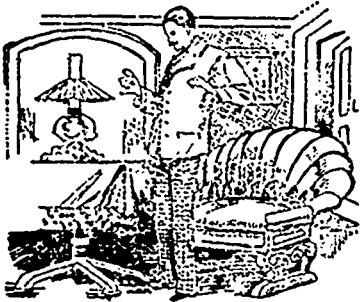
He dimly saw the faint demon rapping for admittance at the smooth doors of Miss Hartman's placidity. He saw the buffed retreat of this demon. He declined to admit even the possibility of Miss Hartman's jealousy.

His acquaintance with women was very slight. He imagined that the passionate affection evinced for him by his promised wife was one of those airy trills, the presence or absence of which was of but slight significance to the welfare of the woman.

One morning Mr. Henshall called at Mr. Hartman's house, more with the object of "reporting for duty," as he styled it in martial irony, than with any well-defined object in view.

Mr. and Mrs. Hartman were out, he was informed. Mrs. Smith, the chaperon, was the only member of the family now at home. She was in the drawing-room, ventured the domestic, discreetly.

Henshall never knew afterwards what it was that prompted him to enter instead of leaving the conventional card to indicate his unsatisfactory visit.



THEN HE STOOPED AND RAISED IT FROM THE FLOOR.

He told the servant his would-day for a time until the arrival of the father and daughter. Then leaving his hat and cane in the hall he walked to the door of the drawing-room, and, with a slight, premonitory knock, entered.

The room unlighted save by a full, red-shaded lamp that cast a pink effluence on objects in its immediate neighborhood.

The young man saw seated on a low chair close to the lamp the attractive form of Mrs. Smith, the chaperon. She had not heard his knock and remained seated, her hands folded listlessly in front of her, her head bent slightly forward, until the sound of his light footfall reached her ear. Then with a start she rose and placed her hand upon the edge of her chair.

"You alarmed me, Mr. Henshall," she declared, with an attempt at a smile that was a signal failure. "I did not expect anybody because Mr. Hartman and Lena have gone out. Look me see," he stammered, "I think they went to a reception at Mrs. Van Arkel's house on the avenue. Did you wish—"

"Nothing," interrupted the young man with a reassuring smile. "I thought I would come in for a few minutes and rest myself."

The absence of Miss Hartman was by no means regrettable. In fact, Mr. Henshall felt a distinct relief at the respite from bald platitudes that her visit on the avenue afforded him.

He looked at Mrs. Smith's face. She had evidently been weeping. He had subtly inculpated a painful realization.

Well, he reflected, she ought to thank him for that, at any rate. That he was no inclined to express any gratitude either by words or by looks was very apparent. It was clear that she did not consider herself bound to entertain Miss Hartman's guest.

After a few uninteresting remarks, uttering unintelligible, she rose and announced her intention of retiring to her room.

"I leave you, so said I," provided with a couple of readable books, and a assurance that you will find them capital entertainers. Of course you will wait to see Lena and Mr. Hartman. I know it would be a great disappointment to you if you failed to meet them.

She accompanied them with a faint, significant smile that was irritatingly visible to Mr. Henshall. He colored slightly, and hit the end of his muscacho to restrain the rather impetuous effort that rose to his lips. Mrs. Smith moved noiselessly about. There were the same telling suggestions about her work that he had noticed before.

"Good night," she said, indifferently.

As she passed him something fell at his feet. He saw it there before him, but made no effort to pick it up for a few seconds. Then he stooped and raised it from the floor. It was an old-fashioned gold brooch, one of those trinkets that we have seen our grandmothers and great-aunts wear, and have admired in the days of our childhood.

At the back of the brooch was a portrait, beautifully colored, and lying out conspicuously from the dull gold frame.

As he looked at it Henry Henshall was conscious of a mental shock, as he had rarely received. The picture conjured up a whole rain of memories that for the last few weeks he had vainly ventured to disfigure for in the starting eyes and uncanon expression of the photograph faced him. He had no difficulty in recognizing the man whom he had seen in the Wagner palace-car and whom he had mentally dubbed the heavy villain of the episode.

In a instant he was on his feet; his hand was upon the door; his intention was instantly to send a servant to Mrs. Smith, summoning her to his presence.

He was passing the door. The door was mysteriously opened and the lady herself entered the room.

"I dropped my brooch," she said apologetically. "No, do not trouble," she added as he made a movement. "I think I know where to find it."

The young man's heart was beating violently. He wanted to tell her that he had picked it up, but was unable to find the words.

He held it up and tried to speak. In an instant she had it attached to her dress. "I would not lose it for the world," she said.

Henry Henshall struggled with his emotion for a moment and overcame it.

"You know that man?" he asked harshly. She looked at him for a moment, then burst into a loud, unmusical laugh.

"If I know that man? Ha! ha! ha! Do I know him? Ah! it is too good. Ha! ha! ha!"

She sat down and laughed hysterically, he looking at her in mute amazement. Suddenly she seemed to secure control of herself. Her laughter ceased; the expression on her face became one of uneasiness. She advanced quietly to Henshall and said, with an indifference which was unconvincing even to the young man.

"Do you know him?"

He answered at once: "I do not know him."

I wish I did, for I believe he is a—a—"

He paused in embarrassment.

"Go on," she said.

"I was going to say," he resumed, "that I believe he is a villain."

"You are right," she said deliberately, fixing her blue eyes on Henshall's whitened face. "He is a villain, and it is his wife that says so."

Henshall recoiled. Intense surprise momentarily bewilder him; then came, like a ray of sunshine, the knowledge that there was a clue to the recovery of his ideal. Not a thought of Lena Hartman entered his mind to thwart his plans.



HER APPEARANCE FILLED HIM WITH VAGUE FRIGHT.

"You know his wife?" he asked.

Again she laughed mirthlessly. "I am the woman unfortunate enough to bear that relation to him," she said. Then, in alarm, "Mr. Henshall, I do not wish to acquaint you with my past life. You have come into possession of a secret through no fault of mine. I beg of you not to betray my confidence."

Her evident sincerity overcame his animosity to the woman.

"Mrs. Smith," he said, "your secret is safe. Tell me, I implore of you, as much about this man as you conscientiously can. To show you how much in earnest I am I will tell you my reasons for asking this."

He then related to her the story of his journey in the Wagner palace-car, omitting no detail likely to interest her.

He then told her (in a strange to say, he really believed it himself), that his object was to find the girl, although engaged to Miss Hartman. He would be perfectly loyal to Lena, but he felt that he could not go through life without having met his ideal, if only to speak with her briefly, to study her beauty for one hour.

He must see her. He would perhaps forget her if his curiosity were satisfied.

Ah! how easy it is to "talk one's self in" as the saying is. What a delightful thing an eased conscience.

Mrs. Smith was a woman of the world, and she understood the complexion of the case far more thoroughly than did young Henshall. But apparently it served her purpose to gratify him.

"Do you know the names of the people with whom you saw him?" she asked.

"Crawford," he answered.

Did you learn that they stopped at No. 3—West Thirty-eighth street?"

"Yes," in intense surprise, "I called there."

"So did I," she said quietly, "but the bird had flown."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]