

## "II."

## IN TWO PARTS.

## I.

## "THE HORNET."

It was still the breathing-time of day in the back parlour of Mrs. Lutestring's well-known mantua-making establishment in Walkers-street, S. W. That is to say, the twelve young ladies, including a niece of the proprietress, who had partaken of the mid-day meal, sat calmly in their chairs, waiting till the clock gave signal for another simultaneous descent into the silk and satin sea.

One hour being allowed for dinner, there generally remained some ten to twenty minutes, which portion—styled by Mrs. Lutestring "recreation"—was devoted by that lady to the cultivation of the minds of her young friends, and the advancement of their knowledge and her own in politics, belles lettres, general society, and dress, through the medium of that comprehensive publication, the Daily Essence of Everything.

"Political," read Mrs. Lutestring. "It is broadly stated that the forthcoming budget will meet the alarming deficit in double half-pins, by a moderate impost on back hair." (Murmurs.)

"Littery," resumed Mrs. Lutestring, who, though far from ill-informed, was not a brilliant scholar. "We understand that of the work just announced by the young German authoress who writes under the hem—the ps—psu—pussydom of 'O-ya,' nearly fifteen thousand copies have been ordered by the trade."

"Having been favored with a sight of the new visiting-bonnet—a diadem of velvet headed by pleated lace, Catalan veil, a natural bird's wing—"

"Shop, 'm!" remarked one of the young ladies timidly.

Mrs. Lutestring, though strict and somewhat stern in business hours, was of a kind and candid nature. With an indulgent smile, she admitted the impeachment, and passed on:

"It is whispered that, so meagre has been the take of pilchards, none can be spared for exportation."

"Why 'whispered?' inquired somebody. "Why couldn't they say it out?"

"Not to wound their feelings, if fish has any," said Mrs. Lutestring, half-jocularly.

"Not to alarm the herrings," suggested her niece, Susan, laughing merrily.

"The long-looked-for nuptials of the Lady Sigismunda Picklethwaite with Sir Derelict Dashwood were celebrated with extraordinary pomp on Wednesday. The bride's dress presented features of unusual interest. Over a rich white sat—"

"Shop! shop! shop! aunt!" exclaimed Susan, her pretty dark blue eyes swimming with mirth. They had beneath them faintly-pencilled shadows, and if a sister shade was perceptible on Susan's delicate upper lip no one would presume to call that which gave harmony and character to one of the prettiest faces in London a moustache.

"Eighty-tighty!" said Mrs. Lutestring, as her eye lit upon another passage. "Well, this is a odd advertisement! Well, if ever! Seventy-five pounds a year! Nothing to do! And, gracious! just listen:

"Wanted.—A female attendant, to wait occasionally upon a complete recluse. Personal labor extremely small. Essential qualities: intelligence, cheerfulness, firmness, secrecy. And—well!" cried Mrs. Lutestring, sinking back in her chair, and bursting into hearty laughter, "what—what do you think?"

"What, 'm? Oh, please, 'm, what?" was the general cry.

Mrs. Lutestring, breathless, could not reply, and Susan, a spoiled favorite, caught the paper from her aunt's lap, found the place in a second, and proclaimed aloud:

"And dark blue eyes!"

"Seventy-five pounds!" said Fanny Sloper.

"For only looking through one's eyes!" added Susan Lutestring.

"What will she have to do?" asked another curious voice.

"Tend on the—hem!—the recluse," replied Mrs. Lutestring.

"Please, 'm, what is a recluse?" asked one of the younger girls.

"Ahem!" said the mistress.

Few knew better than the querist the ordinary meaning of "ahem." But this did not hit the point. She asked again.

Mrs. Lutestring paused, glanced at the clock, half hoping it would come to her rescue.

"Monk," prompted her niece, in an undertone.

"Monkey," responded Mrs. Lutestring, intrusively. "Peculiar specious, very rare, and mischievous."

"Two!" proclaimed the clock. And the circle broke up.

Susan Lutestring lingered.

"Aunt, dear."

"Well, child?"

"Dark blue eyes."

"What then?"

"Mine are dark blue."

"Is they?" said Mrs. Lutestring, indifferently.

"That reminds me," she added, sharply, "you're not to 'tend to Her Highness the Princess Brenhilde von Mustikoff next time. Let Fanny Sloper do it."

"Thank goodness," cried Susan, in a glow of gratitude. "But, aunt, why did my eyes put you in mind of her?"

"She don't like 'em," said Mrs. Lutestring. "Hers are whity-brown," remarked Susan, meditatively.

"P'raps that's the reason," said her aunt. "Anyhow, she must have her way. She's worth twenty other customers. She don't like you, nor yet your eyes. So keep out of her way. Do you know, I'm thinking of having a nice spiral staircase run up through the back of the workroom express for her? She don't like being hustled."

"I'd hustle her," muttered Susan, under her breath. "Well, but, aunt, about that advertisement?"

"Well?"

"Seventy-five pounds! Aunt, who knows if—would you mind?"

"Mind what?"

"You tell me I am often lazy, and I know I'm a slow workwoman, and I'm—"

"A little too high and mighty for our sort of work, eh?" said her aunt, laughing. "But, nonsense, child; here's a fancy!"

"Dear aunt, let us at least answer the advertisement, and get particulars."

"Particulars of waiting on a ape!" ejaculated Mrs. Lutestring.

remain. You are wanted, as I understand, rather to be at hand, and qualify yourself for the future charge of—of our client, than to undertake any immediate active duty. All I can add is that the party is neither an invalid nor a lunatic. It req—ahem—he requires but little attendance, at any time, and indeed the chief agent in that particular is the mother, a refined and rather delicate woman, for whom assistance may at any time become absolutely necessary. So, you see, there is little room for alarm."

Susan at once replied that she saw none at all.

"There is a certain amount of mystery," continued Mr. Allbright. "But that you will not mind, and I may mention, lastly, that should you, after the residence of a week or two, desire to withdraw from the engagement, you will be at liberty to do so, and all expenses will be liberally paid. But I do not think that will come to pass. We happen to know enough of Mrs. Lutestring to absolve us from the necessity of appealing to any other reference, and are strongly of opinion that both parties will be gainers by this most satisfactory arrangement. If convenient you can go down to-morrow."



"VISITING THE SICK."

Susan deferred explanations to a less hurried moment, and, catching up the paper read:

"Address, w... carte de visite, Messrs. Strait-up and Allbright—sols.—130, Lincoln's-inn-fields."

Mrs. Lutestring hesitated. She was herself not without curiosity on the subject.

"Well, well," she said, assentingly. So Susan wrote.

The carte de visite must have been satisfactory. With singular promptitude, a reply was received from Lincoln's-inn-fields, making an appointment for the succeeding day, and, in due course, Susan found herself curtsying to Mr. Allbright, and being motioned to the comfortable chair, in which that gentleman's fairer clients usually ensconced themselves when a prolonged chat was toward.

Mr. Allbright was a handsome-featured man, of middle age, with grizzled hair, and a quick and searching eye, which, like an awl, seemed to make the hole into which his question was to be poured.

"You are firm, intelligent, cheerful, and discreet?" said Mr. Allbright, glancing at the advertisement, a slip of which lay on his desk. "As to the last, can you keep a secret?"

"If required, sir," replied Susan, demurely, thrilling with curiosity.

"I've none to tell you," said the lawyer. "In some points, we are as much in the dark as you are, and as you may, possibly for some time,

Here is the address, and money for your journey."

Susan made her acknowledgements, and prepared to withdraw.

"As touching the qualification mentioned last in our advertisement," observed Mr. Allbright, glancing in his visitor's face, as he walked beside her to the door, "the whim may seem singular—you know we are not responsible for all the caprices of a client—but I think we have been fortunate enough to carry out our unusual instructions in a most efficient manner. Ha, ha! Good day, Miss Lutestring. Two steps if you please."

The card, handed her by Mr. Allbright, bore the address: "Mrs. Grahame Mountjoy. The Hornet, Grandchester."

As Susan hurried homeward, she mentally concocted a respectful announcement to the lady of the Hornet, intimating her intention to present herself at Grandchester on the next day but one.

The interval was spent in needful preparations, warmly promoted by her good-natured relative, who, relieved from the apprehension that Susan's duty was to attend upon a chimpanzee, was almost as curious as herself as to what the mysterious "it" would prove to be. Upon this point Susan pledged herself to forward the earliest and fullest explanation that should be consistent with the discretion re-

quired of her, and with this understanding was sped upon her way.

Grandchester, some hours' railway travel from London, is a fine old cathedral town, which, lying a little aloof from the great highways of commerce, has been somewhat left behind in the general march of improvement; but finds comfort in the preservation of many a time-honored structure, many a venerable historical relic, which might have been called upon to succumb to the inexorable demands of modern taste and modern ideas of the apt and convenient. Not to mention its cathedral, Grandchester possesses a cross—the most ancient in England—a ruined castle, a Saxon church, and a museum overflowing with local antiquities. The Romans, there was no doubt, were partial to the ancient city, and, at their final departure, left behind, with more than their accustomed liberality, pots, pans, old sword-hilts, and pieces of small money, to an unprecedented amount.

On arriving at the station, Miss Lutestring deemed it wisest to charter one of the attendant vehicles, the driver of which, at the mention of the Hornet, dashed away with an alacrity that proved him to be entirely familiar with the name.

Susan, who had rather expected a suburban drive, and to be ultimately deposited in some sequestered precinct, adapted to the taste of a recluse, found herself rattling merrily into the heart of the bustling, well-lighted town, and only relaxing in speed when, turning into the High-street, the number of carriages of different kinds, still on the move, compelled greater caution.

(To be concluded in our next.)

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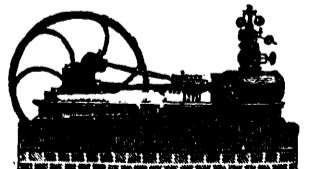
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