

ation as common as daylight; and yet it looks curious in cold type. Without reflection, you will condemn the picture as distorted and untrue; but thinking it over, comparing experiences, investigating a little, you will come to a realization of its truth.

This is the combination: In business matters, Mr. Hyde could be trusted without limit. Mr. Wheeling, his employer, with whom he stood in the most confidential relations, considered him as his right hand, and treated him always with the utmost consideration and respect. He paid him a large salary, with a yearly vacation, and took Mr. Hyde's opinion into account in making every move. And yet, he knew his confidential clerk's escapades, and while he did not approve of them, really considered them as mere trifling episodes in life, not worthy of the most serious contemplation. Mr. Wheeling was a good man, with sons and daughters, a conscientious man, who would not wrong his neighbor, a cultured man, with high ideals; he would have cut off his right hand, if it offended him. He most thoroughly disapproved of Hyde's immoralities, and still, there is the wonder of it, he did not regard them as anything more than trifling inaccuracies. Of course, to do him justice, he did not know details, but he did know enough bestial generalities to have put him on his guard, and to have awakened his interest in the subject to a reforming purpose.

But Mr. Wheeling did not interfere, save weakly, and his business representative went on in his dissolute way.

This was the man sitting on the bench with Mrs. Chapman. There was an intimacy between them, which had grown from the day of the introduction in the hotel. Not a usual intimacy. An idea of wrong doing had never crossed Mrs. Chapman's mind. She had been accustomed to contact with the world. And she permitted no undue familiarity—as she regarded undue familiarity. Of a certain kind, she had wisdom, and she matched her wit against the wit of a man with a confidence that is sometimes a safeguard, and sometimes a help to destruction.

The conversation may be interesting; here is a sample of it; the lady speaking:

"I do not see what life is worth if one is to vegetate in a single place, with a single set of companions forever. There ought to be happiness for everybody; but there is none for me in the existence I am now leading."

"It is as you say, Mrs. Chapman, there is nothing worth having in a life without variety. Women don't get a fair share of it, I must confess. They are bound down by rules, by Mrs. Grundy, and I don't know what besides. I am going to take a trip to the seashore in a few days, I don't need an escort or a chaperone; the idea of my proposing such a thing would be extremely funny. I will go to Long Branch, to Atlantic City, and wherever I like. I will stop at strange hotels and meet strange people. There is no harm in it, but a woman couldn't do that."

"No," said Mrs. Chapman, energetically. "She could not, and that is what I object to. You and I, for instance, couldn't make the trip together, no matter how proper we were. It would make a scandal. Why should it be so? Why shouldn't I be your comrade on a journey, just as properly, as if I were a man?"

"I am sure," said the man, "that I would be glad to chance the scandal for the sake of the pleasure it would give me to have such an agreeable companion."

Mrs. Chapman faced him, and for a moment he thought he had made a false move; but he did not know the woman well. There was much scorn in her answer.

"You would risk the scandal? You? You would give one of your ears to have such a scandal, and you know it. Risk? What do you risk? It would help your reputation—such a thing. While I am in danger, sitting here calmly, in a public place and talking to you though I might really be teaching you your prayers. It would be a choice morsel of gossip, even to see us sitting here."

Mr. Hyde took courage from this and went another step.

"You despise the gossips, I know. You take no care against them. Why not a week or so of pure fun? Why not go with me on the trip? I pledge you my honor—"

The lady interrupted: "Never mind your honor and your oaths based thereon. I do care for the gossips. I am compelled to. They will be my death soon's day. They will tell my husband a story that he will believe, and there may be murder come from it, while all the while I am simply trying to find some amusement—some relief from the treadmill grind of life."

Mr. Hyde leaned toward her, and attempted to take her hand, lying idly in her lap. She put him aside, without surprise, without emotion, saying bitterly:

"Honor! It isn't a part of you. It has no place in your make-up and I verily believe no man possesses it. I have been a chum with you for weeks. Have been meeting you and going to places with you. My husband is away most of the time. I was foolish enough to think that you would be a good fellow, and treat me as a good fellow. But, bah—you are like the rest of that sensual, selfish, mass called men." The last word, delivered with especial scorn, and with the most contemptuous emphasis.

"You must not feel that you are called upon to make an excuse for an apology. I do not feel indignant toward you, especially. I feel like a woman who has found a diamond; has carried it around, elated at being its possessor; has gloated over it in secret; has thought herself rich with a famous jewel, and at last found that her vaunted treasure was cheap, cheap, valueless paste."

"Why, Mrs. Chapman, I beg that you will not think—" he began. She interrupted him.

"What I think, or what I did not think will cut no figure with you. You will not care, and I shall not care that you do not care. You imagined, perhaps, that I was in love with you. You are mistaken. I have had a theory that I could be a companion and friend, I had allusion. You have dispelled it, that is all. Come, it is getting late, let us get the next car down town."

Mr. Hyde, crushed and crestfallen, followed her majestic lead:

"What does she mean, this woman?" he thought.

The character of the man is plain. The motive of his companionship with the handsome wife of an absent husband does not need elucidation.

The character of the women seems not so easy to read. Why should she have had clandestine meetings with this half stranger? She admitted to herself that gossip might have resulted from her actions, and that worse than gossip might have finally befallen. Why did she take these chances? This human comedy is in daily representation. On a thousand stages are the actors strutting, only that the last scene is a little different, generally. At least as men count and women write down. The number of women who halt, and face about, having been unconventional, imprudent, foolish, whatever word you choose to use to describe such actions, before they fall over the precipice, are not counted.

This woman had not entered upon a flirtation. Her innocence and her honesty had never been in any balance. She had no notion for bartering them or exchanging them for anything. The desires of her heart are not the things which are counted morally evil, but they were for the forbidden fruit which society permits not to be plucked, except under conditions which she had violated.

Why could she not do the things that men do? Why could she not, gaily and innocently, go with the companionship of a true man, not her husband, to Long Beach or elsewhere? Why should she be bound to a wheel of conventionality which forbade her, an equal partner with her husband in a matrimonial venture, to do the things which that partner husband might do with impunity?

She would like to go away for a time. She would like to leave husband and meet all long-ought-to-be-remembered friends at the coast.

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