

she had said, simply raved over the supposed Frenchwoman. She had enjoyed the sensation, to acquire which had once been the ruling ambition of her life, of enrapturing her thousands with her beauty; yet even now she was not satisfied.

And why?

Simply because there was one man—and the man she loved at that—that had not embraced the opportunity and was ignorant of and indifferent to the splendors over which the populace raved. Yet she had led the train. Would he remain so?

Mr. Athelstane went to his club that night in a very nervous state of mind. Arriving there, he drank two brandy and sodas—a somewhat unusual dissipation for him—and thought very long and very hard.

For, as a matter of fact, the young lawyer had a secret of which the most intimate of his friends never suspected him—his love of art. Pictures were a passion with him, and any line of art rendered him entirely happy. "A perfect woman," he mused, "I don't believe it. Such a phenomenon does not exist. Purely for the sake of artistic study I will go and see this Mlle. Delacroix and satisfy myself of the idiocy of the mob of newspaper fools who call her perfect."

And the very next night he kept his word. And, as amid the breathless hush of the multitude, the curtain rose, shortly before midnight on the living picture, "Venus on the Halfshell," Mr. Arthur Athelstane's pale cheeks took on an unaccustomed glow, and his stern lips emitted a gentle gasp of astonishment and delight. The pose of the "Venus" was perfect, the delicate tint of the "shell" affording an exquisite foil for the rosy, life-like pink of the tapering limbs, the slender waist, the magnificent shoulders and bust—

Pooh! The curtain fell all too soon and the "rising young lawyer" went out into the lobby and fanned himself. There he met Mr. Fleshleigh the manager, for whom he had often done clever and valuable legal work, and to him he confided his opinion that his "Venus" was absolute perfection.

The manager gave a snort of astonishment at such a remark, coming as it did from the man of parchment and ice. He concealed a grin behind the palm of his hand and whispered, "come back with me and I'll introduce you!"

For an instant Athelstane hesitated. "Will she—will she receive visitors?" he stammered.

"Never asked her, but she will if I say so," rejoined the manager, with easy confidence. "Come on."

Athelstane had not time to refuse, and together the pair threaded their way through the dim passage beneath the stage, the lawyer's heart beating like a trip-hammer at the thought of this unheard-of proceeding on his part.

"You wait a minute," commanded Fleshleigh, knocking at a small door and entering at the sound of a faint "come in" from the interior. Athelstane turned his back and stood discreetly in the shadows, half tempted to flee. There was a buzzing sensation in his ears so great was his fright at his own temerity.

In the dressing room "Venus" was putting the finishing touches to her street attire. "I won't hear of receiving a visitor here, Mr. Fleshleigh," was her prompt response to his request for permission to introduce his friend.

"The deuce you won't," replied the manager, with the bland politeness of his race. "This is no Johnny I'm going to introduce you to, but a man, a gentleman, a swell lawyer. I'll call him. Here, come in, Athelstane!"

At the name Mlle. Delacroix gave a little shriek, and as the autocrat of the theatre turned to admit the caller, who, of course, had not heard her objections, she reached forward and turned the electric light key. "Blast those lights," exploded the manager, "I'll have to introduce you in the dark; Mlle. Delacroix, Mr. Athelstane. Excuse me I'll go and see what's wrong and be back in a minute."

In the pitchy darkness Mlle. Delacroix, in a voice she succeeded in making quite unnatural, said: "Pardon me, but I must ask you

to go at once, sir; I never receive visitors here."

"I will obey gladly, madam," sputtered Athelstane, beside himself with nervousness, "but first let me assure you that I only came"—

"For what?" Mlle. Delacroix was curious now.

"For art's sake. I wished to congratulate you on the justice of the public verdict that you are the only perfect woman in existence."

"Then you did not come to make love to me?" This very impatiently.

"I swear I did not."

Then Mlle. Delacroix did a daring, an unheard-of thing. "I don't believe you know how," she whispered, and grasping the astounded lawyer's face between her tiny hands she gave him a soft, velvety kiss that tasted to him like a mixture of honey, champagne and violets.

The ice was broken. The legal head swam, partly with astonishment, partly with bliss. For an instant he hesitated. Then he reached for her in the darkness and returned the kiss with something like enthusiasm, accompanying the salute with a hug sufficiently bearlike to have convinced a wooden Indian of its sincerity. After which he pushed her violently from him and plunged out into the passageway, slamming the door behind him.

Mlle. Delacroix went home that night with little left to wish for. He was not made of ice.

The next day it was blatantly recorded by the newspapers that Mlle. Delacroix, the peerless "Venus on the Halfshell," had broken her contract and left a saucy little note of farewell to her broken-hearted manager, announcing that she would be on her way to Paris incognito before he received it.

Mr. Arthur Athelstane went about his duties in a dazed fashion. His legal papers were like so many bundles of sanscrit to him. He tried to dictate letters and could not. He was utterly miserable, and yet happy in a way. He was the soul of honor, and the thought of that disloyal kiss haunted him. And yet, the memory of it! It haunted him like the gorgeous dream of an opium eater. As a matter of fact, no woman had kissed that cold but not unhandsome mouth since his estimable aunt had bidden him goodbye years ago, when he was starting away from home to make his way in the world. And there was—a difference.

All at once a great light broke over him. In flight from temptation there was safety. Why not propose to Marian that very day? He loved her, and would atone by years of devotion for that one disloyal act.

Marian received him radiantly, royally. His hands trembled as he possessed himself of her and asked his fateful question.

Her answer was "kiss me."

He obeyed,

Again the dream of honey, champagne and violet.

"My God!" he exclaimed in ecstasy, as he went bowling down the Avenue presently, on his way to the club. "I am safe from disloyalty even in thought. They kiss alike."

"Dearest," remarked Athelstane, in a mystified way, about a year afterward, "I was rumaging among a lot of old books in the lumber room this morning, and I came across a lot of pink tights and things like that. Where on earth do you suppose they came from?"

"Now I am glad I discharged Susanne," remarked his wife, tranquilly. "I was sure she went to French balls and all that sort of things."

—The Sculptor in *Town Topics*.

A FELLOW FEELING.

"I do not know of anything," said the young woman, "that touches me more than Sullivan's Last Chord."

"Well," said farmer Cornroseel. "I certainly kin sympathize with Sullivan. Somebody's been stealin' wood from me fur nigh unto two years."

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