

A CHICAGO SURPRISE.

(The story of an incompatibility adjusted.)

"Well, Jim, how are you?" said she, holding out both hands and then drawing the right one back on second thought.

"What's that for?" demanded Jim, holding the left one a perceptible instant longer than necessary, and regarding her with suspicion.

"Oh, I thought it was a shade to *empressee*, and the summer is over."

"Yes, thank heaven you are back."

"Really, Jim, have you missed me—honestly, now?"

"Yes, I have, upon my word, badly; but I am rewarded for the weary waiting by the joyous leaping of my heart. Can you not see the agitation swelling in my manly bosom?"

"You are stouter than ever," she said disdainfully; "I can see that," slipping into her favorite chair, and indicating one for him sufficiently near to be comfortable, but not so near as to be inconvenient.

"No, you don't really think so!" he said, anxiously, "after all my banting—to say nothing of the lonely hours fraught with pain thinking of you sporting yourself at the Pier, and being driven almost to madness by the mental pictures my agony conjured up."

"And I'll venture to say not one of them exaggerated," she said, mischievously. "Where have you been, Jim? Tell me as much as you will."

"Well, not being as affluent as my mates, I've been in town a good bit, at work, during the week, running away to some near-at-hand place for over Sunday occasionally, always, of course, where I could get a little golfing, for it's the best Sunday game I know. You have such opportunities to find sermons in bunkers and hazards, although the 'good in everything' I won't swear to. But I was on Blog Blair's yacht for four weeks, and that was not so bad."

"No," she said, sitting straight up and looking at him, but his return glance never wavered. Blog has good taste in girls."

"I thought of running down to see you over Sunday—in fact, had my grip all packed, when somebody wanted me to go somewhere."

"Ah, thanks," she said. "So kind of you in the midst of such pre-occupation to cast a thought toward me. However, I will not pretend to feel hurt, as doubtless the burden of your entertainment would have weighed me down heavily. That, do you know, tries me excessively," she went on, adjusting the accordion plaits of her white crepe tea gown, where they had broken across the knee, "having men come to a place where you are having a beautiful time and spend Sunday, as it interferes with the natural and simple flow of your life, and, in fact, kicks up trouble all around."

Jim laughed. "In other words, the men you met down there objected to an irruption of old friends."

"Precisely."

"I should think it might prove annoying. I am glad, now that I see it, that I did not go, for you might have found making excuses for me even harder than the others."

She glanced at him quickly after the speech and saw about his mouth a slight sarcastic line that she had learned by experience it was just as well not to keep there. So, rising, she touched him on the shoulder and said: "You have not asked me to play to you, but I am to do so now." Then trailing her clinging white skirts to the harp that stood in the corner, she seated herself and struck some low chords. "You dear thing," she apostrophized in a low tone, "how I have missed you these long months."

Jim threw himself into the corner of a high backed settle and prepared to en-

joy himself. It was a sight to fill one's artistic soul with pleasure to see her, with the sunset's reflection touching her gold brown hair, with a rapt expression on her lovely face—usually so care-ess—an expression thoroughly genuine, for she adored the instrument, in the playing of which she was past mistress. Presently she began in a sweet soft voice, to sing a little Spanish love song, a voice that had in it now and then a passionate chord that thrilled the most impassive. She had a little trick of almost whispering in places where the words were most intense, that was alluring to the last degree. He half closed his eyes as he watched her, watched her perfect arm, wrist and hand, from which the loose sleeve of her gown had fallen back, and wondered if she realized to the full her infinite power. Then he laughed at his folly for such a thought. She raised her head and looked at him, then rose abruptly and went away from the harp, saying: "Enough of that. Do you know, Jim, that song was most effective this summer? It worked to a charm, unaccompanied even, for you know I never sing with the piano; but I used to sit in the Casino o' moonlighted nights and sing, oh, so successfully, I assure you. However, summer and sentimentality are over. It's quite November, isn't it? And I am sternly practical from now on. Honestly, it worries me, Jim, but I think I am growing to care less for that sort of thing than I did."

"What sort of thing?" asked Jim.

She went on without noticing the interruption. "Two girls at the Pier were talking over their winter plans before me one day. They were awfully sensible nice girls, and somehow they made me feel my uselessness. You should have heard them enumerate the different things they intend to do between now and February, when they are going to Cairo. Their schemes included studying no end of things and charity work, besides society; they are very gay, too."

"Autumn remorse, I see," remarked Jim, rising. "It's all right, Marcia. Don't worry. You'll be all right again by December."

"You are abominable," said she, "and to pay you for that I'm going to give you a *mauvais quart d'heure*. Sit down again."

He followed her over to the harp, where she seated herself once more.

"No more, Marcia. I must go up stairs and dress, as I am dining out to-night abominably early, in order to enable the rabble I am to be with to go to two vaudeilles, at opposite ends of the town."

"Jim, you outdo me," she said, smiling, but with a queer look on her face not exactly of pleasure. "I thought after the summer's separation your wife might possess sufficient attraction to keep you at home the first evening—at dinner, I meant."

So you would, Marcia, surely, had it not been for this engagement and for the certain knowledge that there would be others here. I know by experience that you work down to a *tete-a-tete* with me by degrees."

He spoke lightly, but with evident meaning. She turned away from him, with a little bored expression.

"You are right, Jim, I should have hated it, although for a moment I thought perhaps it would have been nice. Go ahead and get dressed, but—er—by the way, it happens there is to be no one with me tonight. I was tired and did not ask any one. I daresay I shall go straight to bed after dinner, so I will say good night."

She held out her hand with a smile tinged with the proper amount of *ennui* to prevent any weakening on his part.

"Believe me," he said earnestly, "I would have dared the *tete-a-tete* had I known."

"Run along and get ready," she said,

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