

THE Masquerader

By KATHERINE CECIL THURSTON,
Author of "The Circle," Etc.

Copyright, 1903, 1904, by Harper & Brothers

[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER XXIX.

L ODER'S frame of mind as he left Cadogan gardens was peculiar. Once more he was lying in the present—the forced, exhilarating present, and the knowledge braced him. Upon one point his mind was satisfied. Lillian Astrupp had found the telegram, and it remained to him to render her find valueless. How he proposed to do this, how he proposed to come out triumphant in face of such a situation, was a matter that as yet was shapeless in his mind; nevertheless the danger, the sense of impending conflict, had a savor of life after the inaction of the day and night just passed. Chilcote in his weakness and his entanglement had turned to him, and he in his strength and capacity had responded to the appeal.

His step was firm and his bearing assured as he turned into Grosvenor square and walked toward the familiar house.

The habit of self-deceit is as insidious and tenacious as any vice. For one moment on the night of his great speech as he leaned out of Chilcote's carriage and met Chilcote's eyes Loder had seen himself and under the shock of revelation had taken decisive action. But in the hours subsequent to that action the plausible, inner voice had whispered unceasingly, soothing his wounded self-esteem, rebuilding stone by stone the temple of his egotism, until at last when Chilcote, panic-stricken at his own action, had burst into his rooms ready to plead or to coerce he had found no need for either coercion or entreaty. By a power more subtle and effective than any at his command Loder had been prepared for his coming—unconsciously ready with an acquiescence before his appeal had been made. It was the fruit of this preparation, the inevitable outcome of it, that strengthened his step and steadied his hand as he mounted the steps and opened the hall door of Chilcote's house on that eventful afternoon.

The dignity, the air of quiet solidity, impressed him as it never failed to do, as he crossed the large hall and ascended the stairs—the same stairs that he had passed down almost as an outcast not so many hours before. He was filled with the sense of things regained. Relief in his own star lifted him, as it had done a hundred times before in these same surroundings.

He quickened his steps as the sensation came to him. Then, reaching the head of the stairs, he turned directly toward Eve's sitting room and, gaining the door, knocked. The strength of his eagerness, the quick beating of his pulse as he waited for a response, surprised him. He had told himself many times that his passion, however strong, would never again conquer as it had done two nights ago, and the fact that he had come thus candidly to Eve's room was to his mind a proof that temptation could be dared. Nevertheless there was something disconcerting to a strong man in this merely physical perturbation, and when Eve's voice came to him, giving permission to enter, he paused for an instant to steady himself. Then, with sudden decision, he opened the door and walked into the room.

The blinds were partly drawn, there was a scent of violets in the air, and a fire glowed warmly in the grate. He noted these things carefully, telling himself that a man should always be alertly sensible of his surroundings. Then all at once the nice balancing of detail suddenly gave way. He forgot everything but the one circumstance that Eve was standing in the window, her back to the light, her face toward him. With his pulses beating faster and an unsteady sensation in his brain, he moved forward, holding out his hand.

"Eve"—he said below his breath. "Eve"—he remained motionless. As he came into the room she had glanced at him—a glance of quick, searching question, then with equal suddenness she had averted her eyes. As he drew close to her now she remained immovable.

"Eve"—he said again. "I wanted to see you—I wanted to explain about yesterday and about this morning." He paused, suddenly disturbed. The full remembrance of the scene in the brougham had surged up at sight of her—had risen a fierce, unquenchable recollection. "Eve"—he began again in a new, abrupt tone.

And then it was that Eve showed herself in a fresh light. From his entrance into the room she had stayed motionless, save for her first glance of acute inquiry, but now her demeanor changed. For almost the first time in Loder's knowledge of her the vitality

and force that he had vaguely apprehended below her quiet, serene exterior sprang up like a flame within whose red-hot things are illuminated. With a quick gesture, she turned toward him, her warm color deepening, her eyes suddenly averted.

"I understand," she said—"I understand. Don't try to explain. Can't you see that it's enough to—see you as you are?"

Loder was surprised. Remembering their last passionate scene and the damper Chilcote's subsequent presence must inevitably have cast upon it, he had expected to be doubtfully received, but the reality of the reception left him bewildered. Eve's manner was not that of the ill-used wife. Its vehemence, its note of desire and deprecation, were more suggestive of his own recent seizing of the present as distinguished from past or future. With an old sense of confusion he turned to her afresh.

"Then I am forgiven?" he said. And unconsciously as he moved nearer he touched her arm.

At his touch she started. All the yielding sweetness, all the submission, that had marked her two nights ago was gone. In its place she was possessed by a curious excitement that stirred while it perplexed.

Loder, moved by the sensation, took another step forward. "Then I am forgiven?" he repeated more softly.

Her face was averted as he spoke, but he felt her arm quiver, and when at last she lifted her head their eyes met. Neither spoke, but in an instant Loder's arms were around her.

For a long silent space they stood holding each other closely. Then, with a sharp movement, Eve freed herself. Her color was still high, her eyes still peculiarly bright, but the bunch of violets she had worn in her belt had fallen to the ground.

"John," she said quickly, but on the word her breath caught. With a touch of nervousness she stooped to pick up the flowers.

Loder noticed both voice and gesture. "What is it?" he said. "What were you going to say?"

But she made no answer. For a second longer she searched for the violets, then as he bent to assist her she stood up quickly and laughed—a short, embarrassed laugh.

"How absurd and nervous I am!" she exclaimed. "Like a schoolgirl instead



"Then I am forgiven?" he said. "You must help me to be sensible." Her cheeks still burned, her manner was still excited, like one who holds an emotion or an impulse at bay.

Loder looked at her uncertainly. "Eve"—he began afresh with his odd, characteristic perseverance, but she instantly checked him. There was a finality, a faint suggestion of fear, in her protest.

"Don't!" she said. "Don't! I don't want explanations. I want to—enjoy the moment without having things analyzed or smoothed away. Can't you understand? Can't you see that I'm wonderfully, terribly happy to—to have you—as you are?" Again her voice broke—a break that might have been a laugh or a sob.

The sound was an emotional crisis, as such a sound invariably is. It arrested and steadied her. For a moment she stood absolutely still, then with something very closely resembling her old repose of manner she stepped again and quietly picked up the flowers still lying at her feet.

Spring Dry Goods

DRESS GOODS

We are showing a full line of Spring and Summer Dress Goods of the latest patterns.

- Plaids and Figured Goods, 24 inches wide, at... 12½c
- Plaids and Figured Goods, 32 inches wide, at... 25c
- Mohairs, from... 30c to \$1.00
- All wool Plaids, 36 inches wide... 50c, 60c
- Phantom Mohairs... 60c
- Nippon Checks in Silks at... 25c
- Guaranteed Taffeta Silk, 36 in. wide... \$1.00
- Guaranteed Taffeta Silk, 36 in. wide... 1.25
- Peau de Soie, 36 inches wide... 1.50
- Japanese Silk, 27 inches wide... .50

A fine line of Marceline and La Sirene Silks, Organdies, Dotted and India Swisses, etc., 15 to 60c.

Percales, Etc.

- 26 in. Percales... 7c
- 32 in. Percales... 10c
- 36 in. Percales... 12½c
- Ginghams... 7 to 12½c
- Madras... 15 to 18c

Muslin Underwear

We have a full line of Ladies' Muslin Underwear.

Collars

- Turnover... 7 to 50c
- Stock Collars... 15 to 60c



Infants' Long Dresses

- Infants' Long Dresses at 35c to \$1.00.
- Infants' Long Skirts, 25 to 50c
- Infants' Short Dresses, 25 to 75c.
- Infants' Short Skirts, at 20c to 40c.

Gloves

- White Silk Gloves at 50c.
- Long-wristed Black Gloves, \$1.25.

This month's Butterick Patterns are 10¢ and 15¢—none higher.

F. NEWHOUSE, Red Cloud, Nebr.

"Now," she said quietly, "I must say what I've wanted to say all along. How does it feel to be a great man?" Her manner was controlled, she looked at him evenly and directly; save for the faint vibration in her voice there was nothing to indicate the tumult of a moment ago.

But Loder was still uncertain. He caught her hand, his eyes searching hers.

"But Eve"—he began. Then Eve played the last card in her mysterious game. Laughing quickly and nervously, she freed her hand and laid it over his mouth.

"No!" she said. "Not one word! All this past fortnight has belonged to you; now it's my turn. Today is mine."

CHAPTER XXX.

AND so, once again, the woman conquered. Whatever Eve's intentions were, whatever she wished to evade or ward off, she was successful in gaining her end. For more than two hours she kept Loder at her side. There may have been moments in those two hours when the tension was high, when the efforts she made to interest and hold him were somewhat strained. But if this was so it escaped the notice of the one person concerned, for it was long after tea had been served, long after Eve had offered to do penance for her monopoly of him by driving him to Chilcote's club, that Loder realized with any degree of distinctness that it was she and not he who had taken the lead in their interview; that it was she and not he who had bridged the difficult silences and given a fresh direction to dangerous channels of talk. It was long before he recognized this, but it was still longer before he realized the far more potent fact that without any coldness, without any lessening of the subtle consideration she always showed him, she had given him no further opportunity of making love.

Talking continuously, elated with the sense of conflict still to come, he drove with her to the club. Considering that drive in the light of after events, his own frame of mind invariably filled him with incredulity. In the eyes of any sane man his position was not worth an hour's purchase, yet in the blind self-confidence of the moment he would not have changed places with

Fraide himself. The great song of self was sounding in his ears as he drove through the crowded streets, conscious of the cool, crisp air, of Eve's close presence, of the numberless infinitesimal things that went to make up the value of life. It was this acknowledgment of personality that upheld him—the personality, the power that had carried him unswervingly through eleven colorless years; that had impelled him toward this new career when the new career had first been opened to him; that had hewn a way for him in this fresh existence against colossal odds; the indomitable force that had trampled out Chilcote's footmarks in public life, in private life—in love. It was a triumphant psalm that clamored in his ears, something persistent and prophetic, with an undertone of menace—the cry of the human soul that has dared to stand alone.

His glance was keen and bright as he waited for a moment at the carriage door and took Eve's hand before entering the club.

"You're dining out tonight?" he said. His fingers, always tenacious and masterful, continued to hold hers. The compunction that had driven him temporarily toward sacrifice had passed. His pride, his confidence and with them his desire, had flowed back in full measure.

Eve, watching him attentively, paled a little. "Yes," she said, "I'm dining with the Bramfells."

"What time will you get home?" He scarcely realized why he put the question. The song of self still sounded triumphantly, and he responded without reflection.

His eyes held hers, his fingers pressed her hand; the intense mastery of his will passed through her in a sudden sense of fear. Her lips parted in deprecation, but he, closely attentive of her expression, spoke again quickly.

"When can I see you?" he asked very quietly.

Again she was about to speak. She leaned forward, as if some thought long suppressed trembled on her lips, then her courage or her desire failed her. She leaned back, letting her lashes droop over her eyes. "I shall be home at 11," she said below her breath.

Loder dined with Lakeley at Chilcote's club, and so absorbed were the political interests of the hour—the res-

ignation of Sir Robert Seaborough, the king's summoning of Fraide, the probable features of the new ministry—that it was after 9 o'clock when at last he freed himself and drove to the Arcadian theater.

The sound of music came to him as he entered the theater—light, measured music suggestive of tiny streams, toy lambs and painted shepherdesses. It sounded singularly inappropriate to his mood—as inappropriate as the theater itself with its gay gilding, its pale tones of pink and blue. It was the setting of a different world—a world of laughter, light thoughts and shallow impulses, in which he had no part.

It was the interval between the first and second acts. The box was in shadow, and Loder's first impression was of voices and rustling skirts, broken in upon by the murmur of frequent amused laughter. Later, as his eyes grew accustomed to the light, he distinguished the occupants, two women and a man. The man was speaking as he entered, and the story he was relating was evidently interesting from the faint exclamations of question and delight that punctuated it in the listeners' higher, softer voices.

"Ah, here comes the legislator!" exclaimed Leonard Kalne, for it was he who formed the male element in the party.

"The revolutionary, Lennie," Lillian corrected softly. "Bramfell says he has changed the whole face of things." She laughed softly and meaningfully as she closed her fan. "So good of you to come, Jack," she added. "Let me introduce you to Miss Esseltyn. I don't think you two have met. This is Mr. Chilcote, Mary—the great, new Mr. Chilcote." Again she laughed.

Loder bowed and moved to the front of the box, nodding to Kalne as he passed.

"It's only for an hour," he explained to Lillian. "I have an appointment for 11."

"Only an hour! Oh, how unkind! How should I punish him, Lennie?" Lillian looked round at Kalne with a lingering, caressing glance.

He bent toward her in quick response and answered in a whisper.

(Continued on Page Six.)

Get one of those clocks we are giving away.