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ONLY A SEWING GIRL.

BY MAJOR D. E. CONYNGHAM

"Tell Madam Fitwell that this is the last dress she'll ever make for me

The speaker was the only daughter of a wealthy broker who lived in princely style

Maud Swinton was a pretty brunette, rather petite in figure, but graceful and queenly in person

She was brilliant in company, a lively, piquant conversationalist, a good dancer

Possessed as she was of such charms and attractions, combined with her father's respect, wealth, it is no wonder that Miss Swinton was a belle

The person to whom Miss Swinton addressed herself was Miss Fitwell's assistant, who had just brought home a magnificent satin dress

"I assure you, miss, madam made all possible haste with the dress. Two of our hands are sick, and I had to remain up all last night

"I have a good mind to return it to madam and remain at home." "Pardon me, miss, but I am sure if you try it on you will be pleased with the fit, and I think—"

"You think! What do you know, a sewing girl, of what suits the taste of a lady?"

For a moment a blush tinged the pale cheek of the poor girl, and a tear trembled in her eye; but she checked her feelings, for a seamstress had no business to indulge in sentiment

She had not only to feed and clothe herself by the work of her needle, but also had to provide for an aged and helpless father

In fact, there was no real cause for finding fault with the garment, but it happened that Miss Swinton was in one of her pettish fits at the time

The idea of Mr. Leland seeing her in such plain attire shocked her notions of conventional etiquette

When Miss Swinton had cooled somewhat she felt a little ashamed of herself, but unwillingly to make any acknowledgment of this kind, she took up the garment and examining it said: "Well, well, I suppose I must put up with it, as I have promised to accompany a gentleman to-night

"But would you not try it on, miss, before I leave?" "Try it on! it's too late to change it now, so I must run the chance of having it suit me, which I am sure it will"

She took up the dress on her arm, and without bestowing a notice on the other, swept out of the room

As Laura Clinton, for such was the dressmaker's name, passed out of the room, a young man stood in the hall. He eyed her very closely, and as he caught a glimpse of her face he audibly muttered: "My God! can it be Laura?"

He watched the receding figure as she passed down the steps and out on the street, and for a moment seemed undecided as to whether he would follow her or not

The gentleman was no other than Frank Leland, who had called with his heart full of love for Maud Swinton and resolved to lay his hand and heart before her

tones of young lady's voice echoed through the partly open door.

He could not go in under the circumstances, and to retreat was impossible without attracting attention

He could scarcely believe that so sweet a creature could possess such a sharp tongue, and in his heart he congratulated himself that the words which would irrevocably bind him to her had not passed his lips

He entered the empty parlor, and stood meditatively before the fire, a thousand strange thoughts and fancies surging through his brain

"Oh, no, dear. What makes you think so?" he replied, with a forced smile, as he gently took the delicate hand held out to him

"Why, you were so lost in thought that you did not notice me until I was beside you. They say there is a kind of spiritual affinity between some people, that they can feel each other's presence even in the same house; is not that so, Frank?"

"Then you cannot entertain much love from a dream, Mr. Leland, when I had to arouse you from a dream before you knew I was present"

"Indeed, what was it, may I ask?" "Certainly, but I do not know that it concerns you. May I in the first place ask who was the lady in black I met in the hall as I came?"

"Lady?" replied Miss Swinton, with a laugh. "Why, what a strange question. She is only a sewing girl!" "Oh, indeed; do you know I thought I recognized in her the daughter of an old and dear friend of my father's in Chicago?"

"What nonsense, Frank; she is only Madam Fitwell's assistant, who has brought me my dress for to-night"

"I do not possibly know a maid, as you say," replied Mr. Leland, anxious to change the conversation, "but the resemblance was so striking that I could not help noticing it"

"It is not likely that the associates or acquaintances of the fashionable Mr. Leland were among the cannibals of Chicago," retorted Miss Swinton, in rather a pettish tone

Leland noticed the desperate struggle she was making to control her feelings, and smilingly turning to her, he replied: "No, my dear lady, I assure you I have been more particular than that in the selection of my company

His vivacious manner and sparkling sallies soon restored Miss Swinton's good nature. She was brilliant, as usual, when she chose to please, and had so fascinated Mr. Leland that only for the events of the evening he would have surrendered his heart to her

Though wealth and beauty crowded the halls, it was admitted that Miss Swinton was the belle of the night. The richness, taste, and elegance of her dress also attracted considerable attention, and many a fair lady inquired who her modiste was

She really looked superb in her rich robes; her eyes sparkled more brilliantly than her diamonds, and the tint upon her cheek rivalled the bloom of the peach

Many a fashionable young man envied Frank Leland the rich prize within his grasp, and as he and his fair partner promenaded around the room, she learning upon his arm, her sparkling eyes flashing love glances into his, whisperm went round that they were engaged, while many involuntarily exclaimed, "What a charming couple!"

A keen observer, though, could see that though Leland was playing the part of the courteous gentleman, still there was a dignified reserve in his manner which ill became the enamored lover

The following evening Mr. Leland might be seen loitering up and down Fourteenth street. He was evidently

very much smitten with the dresses exhibited in the show window of Madam Fitwell's fashionable millinery establishment

He seemed deeply interested in the shop girls as they gleefully passed out on their way home, and looked as if he expected to recognize some friendly face among them

"Thank God, I have found her!" "He walked beside her for a moment, and as he did so she turned her face toward him. She suddenly blushed and drew her veil over her face, as if wishing to remain unknown"

"Pardon me," he said, in a tremulous voice, as he respectfully doffed his hat, "but I think we are old acquaintances. Are you not Laura Clinton?"

For a moment she stood like a statue; the shock seemed to paralyze her, and she might have fallen had he not taken her arm in his, and whispered: "Courage, dear. Heaven has brought us together at last."

She could scarcely speak, the tears trembled in her eyes, and her lips barely moved as she whispered: "Oh, Mr. Leland, take me home! Take me out of this. I am faint!"

He encouraged her, and leading her into a fashionable restaurant, he made her take a little wine, which soon restored her

He had much to ask her, much to learn of the past, but he feared to agitate her. Still, as they walked together to her humble home, he could not refrain from expressing his joy at having found the lost one

"Laura," he whispered, "I have been looking for you for years. How have you secreted yourself from all your friends?" "When my father became bankrupt in Chicago, Frank, I found that little remained from the wreck. Unable to bear the pitying coldness of those who frowned upon me when I enjoyed wealth and station, father and I quietly removed to New York, hoping that in this modern Babylon I could remain unknown, and bear my poverty without the mocking sympathy of those who had known me in better days

"I owe it to you, Frank," she replied, as a blush tinged her cheek, "to explain my refusal. Heaven knows it was not my heart said no, but I was aware of my father's impending bankruptcy. I did not wish to expose it even to you, and yet I could not marry you, believing me, as you did, to be a wealthy heiress, while in reality I was a pauper"

"It's all over now, dear one. Let us forgive and forget the past, but let us part no more."

She did not withdraw the little hand as he pressed it to his heart, and her eyes spoke the words her lips failed to utter

Poor Mr. Clinton was anxiously awaiting the return of his daughter; she had not yet returned, and he had no news of her, and he was getting childish, and could scarcely bear Laura out of his sight. He even spent hours sitting beside her in the working room, Madam Fitwell kindly tolerating him

As she was later than usual, he fancied that some accident had befallen her and was going out to meet her, when the door opened and she entered leaning on the arm of a gentleman

"Oh, dear, what kept you so long? I was just going to look for you. But who is this, Laura?" "Papa," she said, "let me introduce to you an old friend. Don't you know Frank Leland, of Chicago?" "Frank Leland! to be sure I do. Bless the boy! how he has grown. I would not know an inch of him. But, Frank, times are changed since we met last"

"I'm sorry to say they are, Mr. Clinton, but let us hope for a bright future. Had I been home you would have found a friend to tide you over your difficulties; but there is no use in fretting over the past, Mr. Clinton. I hope to see you once more a flourishing merchant among your old friends, honored and respected as before"

"Ah, Mr. Leland, that cannot be. I have fallen too low for that!" "Mr. Clinton," replied Frank Leland, as he took her in one hand while the other held Laura's, "this sweet girl and I have loved each other for years. She is going to return to Chicago as my wife, and you, I hope, will not object to become my partner in business, filling the place of my deceased father. All we ask now is a parent's blessing and consent"

Let us draw a veil over this scene, which might gladden the sight of angels

Next day Madam Fitwell's forewoman became one of her best customers, and Laura and her father removed from their humble lodgings to princely rooms in the Fifth Avenue hotel

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