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Two of a Kind.

A Story of Inconsequence.

Mrs. Cleeve was distinctly chagrined. When, before, had a man failed to keep a date with her? It was after six, and Paul Denegre did not materialize. She had written him that she was to be in town for a few days, and would dine with him that night, at Naylor's. There she was in the reception room, on time, but where was he? Perhaps the stupid had not made out her note. She had written him in English, as she usually did, to give him practice, but she thought she would confine herself to French in the future. Why should she bother about educating him in a matter that was of no advantage to her?

Mrs. Cleeve was a strikingly pretty woman and a divorcee; the combination was attractive. Men found her amusing—she found them convenient. Having knocked about much for so young a woman, she had learned wisdom, of a certain kind, and it stood her in good stead. She kept straight enough, though she sailed pretty close to the wind, and there were times when she might have gone to leeward but for her boy. He adored his mother, and she tried in her way, to live up to his ideal of her.

People passed in and out of the room and Mrs. Cleeve grew restless. An evening on her hands was not a pleasant prospect. Well, if she could not amuse herself she could go out into the suburbs and see a cousin with whom she sometimes stayed. A ride in an open electric car would be refreshing that hot summer night. She took Denegre out there once, she remembered, and he got absurdly sentimental on the piazza. It was the trees and the moonlight she supposed, or possibly the punch. It was usually on tap out there on warm evenings.

Mrs. Cleeve reached the house to find it closed, and was altogether disgusted with life when she took the car home. She spread herself out on the end of the seat, and was speculating on the perversity of things in general and man in particular, when she was attracted by a familiar figure on the street, and gave a little start of surprise as she saw Mr. Denegre. He had been looking at her before she saw him, and when she smiled and waved her hand, he raised his hat and boarded the car.

Mrs. Cleeve moved along to make room for him, stooping to pull her voluminous skirts about her, and began to talk at once.

"You stupid thing," she said, "did you think I was stopping out here?" But when she raised her head and turned her eyes upon him she uttered an exclamation. It was not Paul Denegre, but a man so exactly like him that he might have passed anywhere. "I—I beg your pardon," she said hurriedly, "it appears it is I who am stupid. I mistook you for a friend."

The man bowed gravely. "May I not answer, as a substitute?" His tone was quiet and courteous. "I am passing through town on my way to the mountains. Deadly hole this, and no decent place to dine that I can discover."

"We do not wander out in the suburbs to dine," Mrs. Cleeve said, airily. There is a place or two in town, I believe, known to the initiated." She had looked the man over and pronounced

him good sort. He had the well-groomed appearance of a man of the world and was charmingly dignified in his manner. Mrs. Cleeve began to be interested. If his method was to give her time to grow accustomed to him, it succeeded admirably.

"It was rather nice to have you smile on me in such a friendly way, and I wish you would go on, even if I am a mistake," the man said calmly. "Were you going in town with your friend? Take me instead." His cool impertinence amused Mrs. Cleeve, and she was decidedly in the mood for an adventure.

"Yes, Sir Curiosity, I was going in town to dine with my friend, and that is why I looked so pleased when I saw you and thought you were the man. I'm hungry, you see."

"Hungry? So am I. Come and dine with me, do, and show me a place 'known to the initiated,' as you say. Something has happened to your friend assuredly. Need you go dinnerless in consequence? Certainly not. You think it a trifle unusual, perhaps? But one so seldom has a chance to do an unusual thing: is not the novelty an inducement?"

Mrs. Cleeve laughed. Who prates novelty these days? It requires little stretch of the imagination to think you are truly my friend. That simplifies my side of it—but your side is more complex. Who am I? Not that it matters," she added quickly.

The situation was decidedly interesting. Why not let it develop a little? It might be an amusing adventure to look back upon.

The man was apparently gazing into space, but he was watching the woman and no detail of her attractive personality escaped him. She was so daintily refined; but his intuitions were keen from a vast experience on two continents, and he thought he knew what she would do. Who was she? But he would find that out later; women grow delightfully communicative over Ruinart.

The car was whizzing over the boulevard. Soon they would be in the heart of the town. Mrs. Cleeve pushed the stray tendrils of hair back from her face and gave her sleeves a pull. How limp the night air made things! She took another look at the man and decided.

"I am coming with you, monsieur. I shall play you're my friend instead of his double, and we'll be very good chums—while the dinner lasts. Will you make a compact with me not to disclose our identity? I am not a curious person, which may make you doubt my femininity, and after an hour or so I shall not see you again, though people do revolve in circles. Is it agreed?"

It struck the man that she was rather adjusting his place for him, and he was given to going his own gait, but he enjoyed in seeing a woman handle the ribbons cleverly.

"Agreed, and there's my hand on it." He put out a shapely, brown hand, and Mrs. Cleeve felt a warm pressure for a moment. Then he stopped the car, and they stepped out and passed into Naylor's, where Mrs. Cleeve had been waiting for Paul Denegre two hours before.

It was a delicious dinner the man ordered, and Mrs. Cleeve was never more entertaining. To his disappointment she did not grow communicative over Ruinart; she had herself too well

in hand. So he met her on her own ground, in the spirit of jolly, good comradeship which she permitted him. He was a man who took things for what they were worth, and he always kept faith with a woman. He thought he had rather got the better of the man who was out of it, but he wanted to lengthen out the dinner indefinitely, since she had stipulated that they were to go their separate ways at the end. Gad, she was a clever woman, and devilish pretty, too. He envied the other man.

Mrs. Cleeve smiled across the table and raised her glass. "Our hour is about over, I think, monsieur. Shall we drink one more toast before we part? To your double, who did not prove your undoing." —The Realist, in Town Topics.

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