

THE Masquerader

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

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Loder pushed back the scattered papers that lay under his arm.

"Only a lunatic would propose such a scheme," he said brusquely and without feeling.

"Why?"

The other's lips parted for a quick retort; then in a surprising way the retort seemed to fall him. "Oh, because the thing isn't feasible, isn't practicable from any point of view?"

Chilcote stepped closer. "Why?" he insisted.

"Because it couldn't work, man—couldn't hold for a dozen hours!"

Chilcote put out his hand and touched his arm. "But why?" he urged. "Why? Give me one unanswerable reason."

Loder shook off the hand and laughed, but below his laugh lay a suggestion of the other's excitement. Again the scene stirred him against his sounder judgment, though his reply when it came was sound enough.

"As for reasons," he said, "there are a hundred, if I had time to name them. Take it, for the sake of supposition, that I were to accept your offer. I should take my place in your house at—let us say at dinner time. Your man gets me into your evening clothes, and there at the very start you have the first suspicion set up. He has probably known you for years, known you until every turn of your appearance, voice and manner is far more familiar to him than it is to you. There are no eyes like a servant's."

"I have thought of that. My servant and my secretary can both be changed. I will do the thing thoroughly."

Loder glanced at him in surprise. The madness had more method than he had believed. Then as he still looked a fresh idea struck him, and he laughed.

"You have entirely forgotten one thing," he said. "You can hardly dismiss your wife."

"My wife doesn't count."

Again Loder laughed. "I'm afraid I scarcely agree. The complications would be slightly—slightly—He paused.

Chilcote's latent irritability broke out suddenly. "Look here," he said, "this isn't a chaffing matter. It may be moonshine to you, but it's reality to me."

Again Loder took his face between his hands.

"Don't ridicule the idea. I'm in dead earnest."

Loder said nothing.

"Think—think it over before you refuse."

For a moment Loder remained motionless, then he rose suddenly, pushing back his chair.

"Tush, man! You don't know what you say. The fact of your being married bars it. Can't you see that?"

Again Chilcote caught his arm.

"You misunderstand," he said. "You mistake the position. I tell you my wife and I are nothing to each other. She goes her way; I go mine. We have our own friends, our own rooms. Marriage, actual marriage, doesn't enter the question. We meet occasionally at meals and at other people's houses; sometimes we go out together for the sake of appearances; beyond that, nothing. If you take up my life nobody in it will trouble you less than Eve—I can promise that." He laughed unsteadily.

Loder's face remained unmoved.

"Even granting that," he said, "the thing is still impossible."

"Why?"

"There is the house. The position there would be untenable. A man is known there as he is known in his own club." He drew away from Chilcote's touch.

ened. "A little while ago you talked of influence. Here you can step into a position built by influence. You might do all you once hoped to do!"

Loder suddenly lifted his head. "Absurd!" he said. "Absurd! Such a scheme was never carried through."

"Precisely why it will succeed. People never suspect until they have a precedent. Will you consider it? At least consider it. Remember, if there is a risk it is I who am running it. On your own showing you have no position to jeopardize."

The other laughed curtly.

"Before I go tonight will you promise me to consider it?"

"No."

"Then you will send me your decision by wire tomorrow. I won't take your answer now."

Loder freed his arm abruptly. "Why not?" he asked.

Chilcote smiled nervously. "Because I know men and men's temptations. We are all very strong till the quick is touched. Then we all wince. It's morphia with one man, ambitions with another. In each case it's only a matter of sooner or later." He laughed in his satirical, unstrung way and held out his hand. "You have my address," he said. "Au revoir."

Loder pressed the hand and dropped it. "Goodby," he said meaningly. Then he crossed the room quietly and the door open. "Goodby," he said again as the other passed him.

As he crossed the threshold Chilcote paused. "Au revoir," he corrected, with emphasis.

Until the last echo of his visitor's steps had died away Loder stood with his hand on the door. Then closing it quietly he turned and looked around the room. For a considerable space he stood there as if weighing the merits of each object. Then very slowly he moved to one of the bookshelves, drew out May's "Parliamentary Practice," and, carrying it to the desk, readjusted the lamp.

CHAPTER VI

ALL the next day Chilcote moved in a fever of excitement. Hot with hope one moment, cold with fever the next, he rushed with restless energy into every task that presented itself, only to drop it as speedily. Twice during the morning he drove to the entrance of Clifford's Inn, but each time his courage failed him and he returned to Grosvenor square to learn that the expected message from Loder had not come.

It was a wearing condition of mind, but at worst it was scarcely more than an exaggeration of what his state had been for months and made but little obvious difference in his bearing or manner.

In the afternoon he took his place in the house, but, though it was his first appearance since his failure of two days ago, he drew but small personal notice. When he chose, his manner could repel advances with extreme effect, and of late men had been prone to draw away from him.

In one of the lobbies he encountered Fraide surrounded by a group of friends. With his usual furtive haste he would have passed on, but moving away from his party the old man accosted him. He was always courteously particular in his treatment of Chilcote, as the husband of his ward and godchild.

"Better, Chilcote," he said, holding out his hand. At the sound of the low, rather formal tones, so characteristic of the old statesman, a hundred memories rose to Chilcote's mind, a hundred hours distasteful in the living and unbearable in the recollection, and with them the new flash of hope, the new possibility of freedom. In a sudden rush of confidence he turned to his leader.

"I believe I've found a remedy for my nerves," he said. "I—I believe I'm going to be a new man." He laughed with a touch of excitement.

Fraide pressed his fingers kindly. "That is right," he said. "That is right. I called at Grosvenor square this morning, but Eve told me your illness of the other day was not serious. She was very busy this morning. She could only spare me a quarter of an hour. She is indefatigable over the social side of your prospects, Chilcote. You owe her a large debt. A popular wife means a great deal to a politician."

The steady eyes of his companion disturbed Chilcote.

He drew away his hand.

"Eve is unique," he said vaguely.

Fraide smiled. "That is right," he said again. "Admiration is too largely excluded from modern marriages." And with a courteous excuse he rejoined his friends.

It was dinner time before Chilcote could desert the house, but the moment departure was possible he hurried to Grosvenor square.

As he entered the house the hall was empty. He swore irritably under his breath and pressed the nearest bell. Since his momentary exaltation in Fraide's presence his spirits had steadily fallen until now they hung at the lowest ebb.

As he waited in unconcealed impatience for an answer to his summons he caught sight of his man Allsopp at

the head of the stairs.

"Come here!" he called, pleased to find some one upon whom to vent his irritation. "Has that wire come for me?"

"No, sir. I inquired five minutes back."

"Inquire again."

"Yes, sir," Allsopp disappeared. A second later after his disappearance the bell of the hall door whizzed loudly.

Chilcote started. All sudden sounds, like all strong lights, affected him. He half moved to the door, then stopped himself with a short exclamation. At the same instant Allsopp reappeared.

Chilcote turned on him excitedly.

"What the devil's the meaning of this?" he said. "A battery of servants in the house and nobody to open the hall door?"

Allsopp looked embarrassed. "Crap-ham is coming directly, sir. He only left the hall to ask Jeffries."

Chilcote turned. "Confound Crap-ham!" he exclaimed. "Go and open the door yourself."

Allsopp hesitated, his dignity struggling with his obedience. As he waited the bell sounded again.

"Did you hear me?" Chilcote said. "Yes, sir," Allsopp crossed the hall. As the door was opened Chilcote passed his handkerchief from one hand to the other in the tension of hope and fear, then as the sound of his own name in the shrill tones of a telegraph boy reached his ears he let the handkerchief drop to the ground.

Allsopp took the yellow envelope and carried it to his master.

"A telegram, sir," he said. "And the boy wishes to know if there is an answer." Picking up Chilcote's handkerchief, he turned aside with elaborate dignity.

Chilcote's hands were so unsteady that he could scarcely insert his finger under the flap of the envelope. Tearing off a corner, he wrenched the covering apart and smoothed out the flimsy pink paper.

The message was very simple, consisting of but seven words: Shall expect you at 11 tonight.

He read it two or three times, then he looked up. "No answer," he said mechanically, and to his own ears the relief in his voice sounded harsh and unnatural.

Exactly as the clocks chimed 11 Chilcote mounted the stairs to Loder's rooms. But this time there was more of haste than of uncertainty in his steps, and, reaching the landing, he crossed it in a couple of strides and knocked feverishly on the door.

It opened at once, and Loder stood before him.

The occasion was peculiar. For a moment neither spoke; each involuntarily looked at the other with new eyes and under changed conditions. Each had assumed a fresh standpoint in the other's thought. The passing astonishment, the half impersonal curiosity that had previously tinged their relationship, was cast aside, never to be reassumed. In each the other saw himself—and something more.

As usual, Loder was the first to recover himself.

"I was expecting you," he said. "Won't you come in?"

The words were almost the same as his word of the night before, but his voice had a different ring, just as his face when he drew back into the room had a different expression—a suggestion of decision and energy that had been lacking before. Chilcote caught the difference as he crossed the threshold, and for a bare second a flicker of something like jealousy touched him, but the sensation was fleeting.

"I have to thank you," he said, holding out his hand. He was too well bred to show by a hint that he understood the drop in the other's principles, but Loder broke down the artifice.

"Let's be straight with each other, since everybody else has to be deceived," he said, taking the other's hand. "You have nothing to thank me for, and you know it. It's a touch of the old Adam. You tempted me, and I fell." He laughed, but below the laugh ran a note of something like triumph—the curious triumph of a man who has known the tyranny of strength and suddenly appreciates the freedom of a weakness.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Not Anxious to Please.

Neptune—I say, Boreas, if you keep on blowing like that you'll get yourself disliked. Boreas—What do I care? It isn't my business to furnish popular airs.—Modern Society.

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Remember the name,—Doans,—and take no other.

A committee from the Central Methodist church in Spartanburg has been appointed to solicit subscriptions for the erection of another church building. The Central church is so large that the congregation has decided to form two churches.

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Mr. W. O'Reilly Fogarty, who is a member of the City Council at Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies, writes as follows: "One bottle of Chamberlain's Cough Remedy had good effect on a cough that was giving me trouble and I think I should have been more quickly relieved if I had continued the remedy. That it was beneficial and quick in relieving me there is no doubt and it is my intention to obtain another bottle." For sale by Union Drug Co.

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UNITED STATES COURT OF CLAIMS. The Publishers of Webster's International Dictionary allege that it is, in fact, the popular Unabridged thoroughly re-edited in every detail, and vastly enriched in every part, with the purpose of adapting it to meet the larger and severer requirements of another generation. We are of the opinion that this allegation most clearly and accurately describes the result that has been accomplished and the result that has been reached. The Dictionary, as it now stands, has been thoroughly re-edited in every detail, has been corrected in every part, and is admirably adapted to meet the larger and severer requirements of a generation which demands more of popular philological knowledge than any generation that the world has ever contained. It is perhaps needless to add that we refer to the dictionary in our judicial work as the highest authority in accuracy of definition; and that in the future as in the past it will be the source of constant reference.

CHARLES C. BOTT, Chief Justice.
LAWRENCE WELDON, JOHN DAVIS, JAMES J. FEELE, CHARLES R. HOWEY, Judges.
The above refers to WEBSTER'S INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY
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Tax Assessment Notice.

The time for taking tax returns begins on the 1st day of January, 1907, and expires on the 20th day of February, 1907.

It is required by law, that all personal property be returned, and those failing to return will be liable to 50 per cent. penalty on same.

All land owners should see that their tenants make their returns in the proper time.

All returns not made to the auditor, or his clerk, must be sworn to before some one competent to administer an oath.

I will be in the office at Union from the 1st day of January to the 20th, after which time will be at the following places:

Buffalo Mills, January 21.
West Springs, January 22.
Gibbs, forenoon, January 23.
Harrison's store, afternoon, January 23.

Wilburn's store, Cross Keys, January 24.
Sedalia, Minter's store, January 25.

Black Rock, forenoon, January 26.
Carlisle, January 28.

Santuc, January 29.
Adamsburg, January 30.
Lockhart Mills, January 31.
Kelton, February 1.
Jonesville, February 2.

Monarch Mills, forenoon, February 4.
Aetna Mills, afternoon, February 4.

From the 5th day of February to the 20th, in office. All male citizens between the ages of 21 and 60 years are liable to pay a poll tax, except the following, who are exempt:

Confederate soldiers, school trustees, and those who are afflicted to the extent that they are not able, on account of such affliction, to make a support for themselves. A leg or an arm being broken does not exempt a person from paying poll tax.

Don't forget to make your returns, as the comptroller general positively requires the 50 per cent. penalty to be charged to those who do not make their returns, regardless of who they are.

John G. Farr,
Auditor.

Land Sale.

We offer for sale the tract of land owned by our father, Lafayette Hill, lying two miles east of Jonesville, containing one hundred acres. There are two tenant houses and some out-buildings on the place, and a fine spring near the house. This land is offered for sale next salesday in Union, S. C., at the court house. Terms of sale: One-third cash and balance in equal payments of one and two years, purchaser to give mortgage and pay interest on balance at the rate of 8 per cent. per annum, and also to pay for necessary papers.

John W. Hill,
Jonesville, S. C.