

THE Masquerader

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

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Loder turned. "Why, in the devil's name," he began; then again he halted. Something in Chilcote's drawn, excited face checked him. The strange sense of predestination that we sometimes see in the eyes of another struck cold upon him, chilling his last attempt at remonstrance. "What do you want me to do?" he substituted in an ordinary voice.

The words steadied Chilcote. He laughed a little. The laugh was still shaky, but it was pitched in a lower key.

"You—you're quite right to pull me up. We have no time to waste. It must be 1 o'clock." He pulled out his watch, then walked to the window and stood looking down into the shadowy court. "How quiet you are here!" he said. Then abruptly a new thought struck him, and he wheeled back into the room. "Loder," he said quickly—"Loder, I have an idea! While you are here, why shouldn't I be you? Why shouldn't I be John Loder instead of the vagrant we contemplated? It covers everything; it explains everything. It's mag' cent! I'm amazed we never thought of it before."

Loder was still beside the desk. "I thought of it," he said without looking back.

"And didn't suggest it?"

"No."

"Why?"

Loder said nothing, and the other colored.

"Jealous of your reputation?" he said satirically.

"I have none to be jealous of."

Chilcote laughed disagreeably. "Then you aren't so far gone in philosophy as I thought. You have a niche in your own good opinion."

Again Loder was silent; then he smiled. "You have an odd correct perception at times," he said. "I suppose I have had a lame sort of pride in keeping my name clean, but pride like that is out of fashion, and I've got to float with the tide." He laughed a short laugh that Chilcote had heard once or twice before, and, crossing the room, he stood beside his visitor.

"After all," he said, "what business have I with pride, straight or lame? Have my identity, if you want it. When all defenses have been broken down one barrier won't save the town." Laughing again, he laid his hand on the other's arm. "Come," he said, "give your orders. I capitulate."

An hour later the two men passed from Loder's bedroom, where the final arrangements had been completed, back into the sitting room. Loder came first in faultless evening dress. His hair was carefully brushed, the clothes he wore fitted him perfectly. To any glance, critical or casual, he was the man who had mounted the stairs and entered the rooms earlier in the evening. Chilcote's manner of walking and poise of the head seemed to have descended upon him with Chilcote's clothes. He came into the room hastily and passed to the desk.

"I have no private papers," he said, "so I have nothing to look up. Everything can stand as it is. A woman named Robins comes in the mornings to clean up and light the fire; otherwise you must shift for yourself. No body will disturb you. Quiet, dead quiet, is about the one thing you can count on."

Chilcote, half halting in the doorway, made an attempt to laugh. Of the two he was noticeably the more embarrassed. In Loder's well worn, well brushed tweed suit he felt stranded on his own personality, bereft for the moment of the familiar accessories that helped to cloak deficiencies and keep the wheel of conventionality comfortably rolling. He stood unpleasantly conscious of himself, unable to shape his sensations even in thought. He glanced at the fire, at the table, finally at the chair on which he had thrown his overcoat before entering the bedroom. At the sight of the coat his gaze brightened, the aimlessness forsook him, and he gave an exclamation of relief.

"By Jove!" he said. "I clean forgot."

"What?" Loder looked round.

"The rings." He crossed to the coat and thrust his hand into the pocket. "The duplicates arrived only this afternoon—the nick of time, eh?" He spoke fast, his fingers searching busily. Occupation of any kind came as a boon.

Loder slowly followed him, and as the box was brought to light he leaned forward intently.

"As I told you, one is the copy of an old signet ring, the other a plain band—a plain gold band like a wedding ring." Chilcote laughed as he placed the four rings side by side on his palm. "I could think of nothing else that would be wide and not ostentatious. You know how I detest display."

Loder touched the rings. "You have good taste," he said. "Let's see if they serve their purpose." He picked them up and carried them to the lamp.

Chilcote followed him. "That was an ugly wound," he said, his curiosity reawakening as Loder extended his finger. "How did you come by it?"

The other smiled. "It's a memento," he said.

"Of bravery?"

"No; quite the reverse." He looked again at his hand, then glanced back at Chilcote. "No," he repeated, with an unusual impulse of confidence. "It serves to remind me that I am not exempt—that I have been fooled like other men."

"That implies a woman?"

"Yes." Again Loder looked at the scar on his finger. "I seldom recall the thing, it's so absolutely past. But I rather like to remember it tonight. I rather want you to know that I've been through the fire. It's a sort of guarantee."

Chilcote made a hasty gesture, but the other interrupted it.

"Oh, I know you trust me. But you're giving me a risky post. I want you to see that women are out of my line—quite out of it."

"But, my dear chap—"

Loder went on without heeding. "This thing happened eight years ago at Santasalar," he said, "a little place between Luna and Pistoria—a mere handful of houses wedged between two hills; a regular relic of old Italy crumbling away under flowers and sunshine, with nothing to suggest the present century except the occasional passing of a train round the base of one of the hills. I had literally stumbled upon the place on a long tramp south from Switzerland and had been tempted into a stay at the little inn. The night after my arrival something unusual occurred. There was an accident to the train at the point where it skirted the village."

"There was a small excitement. All the inhabitants were anxious to help, and I took my share. As a matter of fact, the smash was not disastrous; the passengers were hurt and frightened, but nobody was killed."

He paused and looked at his companion; but, seeing him interested, went on.

"Among these passengers was an English lady. Of all concerned in the business, she was the least upset. When I came upon her she was sitting on the shattered door of one of the carriages calmly arranging her hat. On seeing me she took up with the most charming smile imaginable."

"I have just been waiting for somebody like you," she said. "My stupid maid has got herself smashed up somewhere in the second class carriage, and I have nobody to help me find my dog."

"Of course, that first speech ought to have enlightened me, but it didn't. I only saw the smile and heard the voice. I knew nothing of whether they were deep or shallow. So I found the maid and found the dog. The first expressed gratitude, the other didn't. I extricated him with enormous difficulty from the wreck of the luggage van, and this was how he marked his appreciation."

He held out his hand and nodded toward the scar.

Chilcote glanced up. "So that's the explanation?"

"Yes. I tried to conceal the thing when I restored the dog, but I was bleeding abominably and I failed. Then the whole business was changed. It was I who needed seeing to, my new friend insisted; I who should be looked after and not she. She forgot the dog in the newer interest of my wounded finger. The maid, who was practically unharmed, was sent on to engage rooms at the little inn, and she and I followed slowly."

"That walk impressed me. There was an attractive mistiness of atmosphere in the warm night, a sensation more than attractive in being made much of by a woman of one's own class and country after five years' wandering."

He laughed with a touch of irony.

"But I won't take up your time with details. You know the progress of an ordinary love affair. Throw in a few more flowers and a little more sunshine than is usual, a man who is practically a hermit and a woman who knows the world by heart and you have the whole thing."

"She insisted on staying in Santasalar for three days in order to keep my finger bandaged. She ended by staying three weeks in the hope of smashing up my life."

"On coming to the hotel she had given no name, and in our first explanations to each other she led me to conclude her an unmarried girl. It was at the end of the three weeks that I learned that she was not a free agent, as I had innocently imagined, but possessed a husband whom she had left ill with malaria at Florence or Rome."

"The news disconcerted me, and I took no pains to hide it. After that the end came abruptly. In her eyes I had become a fool with middle class principles; in my eyes—But there is no need for that. She left Santasalar the same night in a great confusion of trunks and hatboxes, and next morning I strapped on my knapsack and turned my face to the south."

"And women don't count ever after?"

Chilcote smiled, beguiled out of himself.

Loder laughed. "That's what I've been trying to convey. Once bitten, twice shy!" He laughed again and slipped the two rings over his finger with an air of finality.

"Now, shall I start? This is the latch-key?" He drew a key from the pocket of Chilcote's evening clothes. "When I get to Grosvenor square I am to find your house, go straight in, mount the stairs and there on my right hand will be the door of your—I mean my own—private rooms. I think I've got it by heart. I feel inspired. I feel that I can't go wrong." He handed the two remaining rings to Chilcote and picked up the overcoat.

"I'll stick on till I get a wire," he said. "Then I'll come back and we'll reverse again." He slipped on the coat and moved back toward the table. Now that the decisive moment had come it embarrassed him. Scarcely knowing how to bring it to an end, he held out his hand.

Chilcote took it, palling a little. "I'll be all right!" he said, with a sudden return of nervousness. "I'll be all right! And I've made it plain about—about the remuneration? A hundred a week, besides all expenses."

Loder smiled again. "My pay? Oh, yes, you've made it clear as day. Shall we say good night now?"

"Yes. Good night."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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Stern Father—He who sows the wind reaps the whirlwind. Prodigal Son—Well, he raises the wind anyway.

The way of the world is to praise dead saints and persecute living ones.—Howe.

For Rheumatism Sufferers.

The quick relief from pain afforded by applying Chamberlain's Pain Balm makes it a favorite with sufferers from Rheumatism, sciatica, lame back, lumbago, and deep seated and muscular pains. For sale by Union Drug Co.

The notorious Thaw murder trial is under way. The plea put up by the defense is insanity.

Skin Diseases of Twenty Years' Standing Cured.

I want you to know how much Chamberlain's Salve has done for me. It has cured my face of a skin disease of almost twenty years' standing. I have been treated by several of the smart physicians as we have in this country and they did me no good, but two boxes of this salve has cured me. Mrs. Fannie Griffin, Troy, Ala. Chamberlain's Salve is for sale by Union Drug Co.

A man named Griffin and the two-year-old daughter of a man named Farmer, died in Piedmont of hydrophobia Monday night. They were bitten about two weeks before by a mad dog.

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says C. G. Hays, a prominent business man of Bluff, Mo., "that Bucklen's Arnica Salve is the quickest and surest healing salve ever applied to a sore, burn or wound, or to a case of piles. I've used it and know what I'm talking about." Guaranteed by all druggists.

Rev. Robt. H. Reid, aged 86 years, died at his home in Reidville Sunday morning. He was one of the oldest ministers of the Presbyterian church. For 46 years he was pastor of Nazareth church, and during that time 6 churches have grown out of the church under his ministry. He had been president of the Reidville Female college since the year 1858.

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is an expression as old as the race. No doubt the rising and setting of the sun is the most regular performance in the universe, unless it is the action of the liver and bowels when regulated with Dr. King's New Life Pills. Guaranteed by all druggists.

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Chamberlain's Cough Remedy a Favorite

"We prefer Chamberlain's Cough Remedy to any other for our children," says Mr. L. J. Woodbury, of Twinning, Mich. "It has also done the work for us in hard colds and croup, and we take pleasure in recommending it." For sale by Union Drug Co.

The city of Spartanburg, through its police force, has started a crusade against minors playing pool in that city. Some time ago the city council passed an ordinance to that effect, and Mayor Floyd is determined to see that the law is carried out.

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The right thing to do when you feel bilious is to take a dose of Chamberlain's Stomach and Liver Tablets. They will cleanse the stomach and regulate the liver and bowels. Try it. Price 25 cents. Samples free at Union Drug Co.'s drug store.

The total number of prisoners received in the State penitentiary during the past year was 232. The number in confinement at the beginning of the year was 653. There were 5 recaptured. This makes a total of 890. The number discharged by expiration of sentence was 130; discharged by pardon, 14; died, 23; escaped, 7; leaving in prison at the end of the year 716.

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There is real pleasure in chewing the best tobacco grown—where the best tobacco grows—in the famous Piedmont Country.

Only choice selections of this well-matured and thoroughly cured tobacco is used in making SCHNAPPS. That's why SCHNAPPS and others of the Reynold's brands, as shown by the Internal Revenue statistics for a fiscal year, made the wonderful growth of six and one-quarter million pounds, or a net gain of one-third of the entire increased consumption of chewing and smoking tobaccos in the United States.

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SCHNAPPS is like a cup of fine Java coffee, sweetened just enough to bring out its natural, stimulating qualities. SCHNAPPS pleases all classes of chewers: the rich, because they do not find a chew that really pleases them better at any price; the poor, because it is more economical than the large 10c. or 15c. plugs and they get their money's worth of the real snappy, stimulating flavor so appreciated by tobacco lovers. All imitations contain much more sweetening than SCHNAPPS. They are made that way to hide poor tobacco improperly cured.

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Final Discharge.

Notice is hereby given that Mrs. E. F. Bailey, Administratrix, with the will annexed, of the Estate of J. M. Plaxico, deceased, has applied to W. W. Johnson, Judge of Probate in and for the county of Union, for a final discharge as such administratrix.

It is ordered, that the 25th day of February A. D. 1907, be fixed for hearing of petition, and a final settlement of said estate.

W. W. Johnson, Probate Judge Union County. Published in the Union Times 4-4t.

NOTICE!

Notice is hereby given that the annual meeting of the stockholders of the Ophir Gold Mining Co. will be held Feb. 12, 1907, at 3 o'clock p. m., at the office of H. L. Scaife, in the Foster Building, Union, S. C.

W. K. Bellis, Pres.

J. O. Stillson, Secy. 4-3t

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