

THE Masquerader

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

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After the dimness of the pavilion the conservatory seemed comparatively bright, but without waiting to grope accustomed to the altered light he moved onward with deliberate haste. The long green alley was speedily traversed. In his eyes it no longer possessed greenness, no longer suggested freshness or repose. It was simply a means to the end upon which his mind was set.

As he passed up the flight of steps he drew his rings from his pocket and slipped them on again. Then he stepped into the glare of the thronged corridor.

Some one hailed him as he passed through the crowd, but with Chilcote's most absorbed manner he hurried on. Through the door of the supper room he caught sight of Blessington and Eve, and then for the first time his expression changed, and he turned directly toward them.

"Eve," he said, "will you excuse me? I have a word to say to Blessington."

She glanced at him in momentary surprise; then she smiled in her quiet, self-possessed way.

"Of course," she said. "I've been wanting a chat with Millicent Gower, but Bobby has required so much entertaining."

She smiled again, this time at Blessington, and moved away toward a pale girl in green who was standing alone.

Instantly she had turned Loder took Blessington's arm.

"I know you're tremendously busy," he began in an excellent imitation of Chilcote's hasty manner—"I know you're tremendously busy, but I'm in a fix."

One glance at Blessington's healthy, ingenuous face told him that plain speaking was the method to adopt.

"Indeed, sir?" In a moment Blessington was on the alert.

"Yes. And I—I want your help."

The boy reddened. That Chilcote should appeal to him stirred him to an uneasy feeling of pride and uncertainty.

Loder saw his advantage and pressed it home. "It's come about through this crystal gazing business. I'm afraid I didn't play my part—rather made an ass of myself. I wouldn't swallow the 'and-and-Lady Astrupp'—He paused, measuring Blessington with a glance. "Well, my dear boy, you—you know what women are."

Blessington was only twenty-three. He reddened again and assumed an air of profundity. "I know, sir," he said, with a shake of the head.

Loder's sense of humor was keen, but he kept a grave face. "I knew you'd catch my meaning. But I want you to do something more. If Lady Astrupp should ask you who was in her tent this past ten minutes, I want you—"

Again he stopped, looking at his companion's face.

"Yes, sir?"

"I want you to tell an immaterial lie for me."

Blessington returned his glance; then he laughed a little uncomfortably. "But surely, sir?"

"She recognized me, you mean?" Loder's eyes were as keen as steel.

"Yes."

"Then you're wrong. She didn't."

Blessington's eyebrows went up.

There was silence. Loder glanced across the room. Eve had parted from the girl in green and was moving toward them, exchanging smiles and greetings as she came.

"My wife is coming back," he said. "Will you do this for me, Blessington? It—it will smooth things." He spoke quickly, continuing to watch Eve. As he had hoped, Blessington's eyes turned in the same direction. "Twice smooth matters," he repeated—"smooth them in—a domestic way that I can't explain."

The shot told. Blessington looked round.

"Right, sir," he said. "You may leave it to me." And before Loder could speak again he had turned and disappeared into the crowd.

CHAPTER XVI.

His business with Blessington over, Loder breathed more freely. If Lady Astrupp had recognized Chilcote by the rings and had been roused to curiosity the incident would demand settlement sooner or later—settlement in what proportion he could hazard no guess. If, on the other hand, her obvious change of manner had arisen from any other source—he had a hazy idea that a woman's behavior could never be gauged by accepted theories—then he had safeguarded Chilcote's interests and his own by his securing of Blessington's promise. Blessington he knew would be reliable and discreet. With a renewal of confidence—a pleasant feeling that his uneasiness had been groundless—he moved forward to greet Eve.

Her face, with its rich, clear coloring, seemed to stand out from the crowd of other faces as from a frame, and a sense of pride touched him. In every eye but his own her beauty belonged to him.

His face looked alive and masterful as she reached his side. "May I monopolize you?" he said with the quick-

ness of speech borrowed from Chilcote. "We—we see so little of each other."

Almost as if compelled, her lashes lifted, and her eyes met his. Her glance was puzzled, uncertain, slightly confused. There was a deeper color than usual in her cheeks. Loder felt something within his own consciousness stir in response.

"You know you are yielding," he said.

Again she blushed.

He saw the blush and knew that it was he—his words, his personality—that had culled it forth. In Chilcote's actual semblance he had proved his superiority over Chilcote. For the first time he had been given a tacit, personal acknowledgment of his power. Involuntarily he drew nearer to her.

"Let's get out of this crush," he said.

She made no answer except to bend her head, and it came to him that, for all her pride, she liked—and unconsciously yielded to—domination. With a satisfied gesture he turned to make a passage toward the door.

But the passage was more easily desired than made. In the few moments since he had entered the supper room the press of people had considerably thickened until a block had formed about the doorway. Drawing Eve with him he moved forward for a dozen paces, then paused, unable to make further headway.

As they stood there he looked back at her. "What a study in democracy a crowd always is!" he said.

She responded with a bright, appreciative glance, as if surprised into naturalness. He wondered sharply what she would be like if her enthusiasm were really aroused. Then a stir in the corridor outside caused a movement inside the room, and with a certain display of persistence he was enabled to make a passage to the door.

There again they were compelled to halt. But though tightly wedged into his new position and guarding Eve with one arm, Loder was free to survey the brilliantly thronged corridor over the head of a man a few inches shorter than himself, who stood directly in front of him.

"What are we waiting for?" he asked good humoredly, addressing the back of the man's head.

The man turned, displaying a genial face, a red mustache and an eyeglass. "Hullo, Chilcote!" he said. "Hope it's not on your feet I'm standing."

Loder laughed. "No," he said. "And don't change the position. If you were an inch higher I should be blind as well as crippled."

The other laughed. It was a pleasant surprise to find Chilcote amiable under discomfort. He looked round again in slight curiosity.

Loder felt the scrutiny. To create a diversion he looked out along the corridor. "I believe we are waiting for something," he exclaimed. "What's this?" Then quite abruptly he ceased to speak.

"Anything interesting?" Eve touched his arm.

He said nothing. He made no effort to look round. His thought as well as his speech was suddenly suspended.

The man in front of him let his eyeglass fall from his eye, then screwed it in again.

"Jove," he exclaimed, "here comes our sorceress! It's like the progress of a fairy princess. I believe this is the meaning of our getting penned in here." He chuckled delightedly.

Loder said nothing. He stared straight on over the other's head.

Along the corridor, agreeably conscious of the hum of admiration she aroused, came Lillian Astrupp, surrounded by a little court. Her delicate face was lit up; her eyes shone under the faint gleam of her hair; her gown of gold embroidery swept round her gracefully. She was radiant and triumphant, but she was also excited. The excitement was evident in her laugh, in her gestures, in her eyes, as they turned quickly in one direction and then another.

Loder, gazing in stupefaction over the other man's head, saw it—felt and understood it with a mind that leaped back over a space of years. As in a shifting panorama he saw a night of disturbance and confusion in a faroff Italian valley—a confusion from which one face shone out with something of the pale, alluring radiance that filtered over the hillside from the crescent moon. It passed across his consciousness slowly, but with a slow completeness, and in its light the incidents of the past hour stood out in a new aspect. The echo of recollection stirred by Lady Brambell's voice, the re-echo of it in the sister's tones; his own blindness, his own egregious assurance—all struck across his mind.

Meanwhile the party about Lillian drew nearer. He felt with instinctive certainty that the supper room was its destination, but he remained motionless, held by a species of fatalism. He watched her draw near with an unmoved face; but in the brief space that passed while she traversed the corridor he gauged to the full the hold that the new atmosphere, the new existence, had gained over his mind. With an unlooked-for rush of feeling he realized how dearly he would part with it.

As Lillian came closer the meaning

of her manner became clearer to him. She talked incessantly, laughing now and then, but her eyes were never quiet. These skimmed the length of the corridor, then glanced over the heads crowded in the doorway.

"I'll have something quite sweet, Geoffrey," she was saying to the man beside her as she came within hearing. "You know what I like—a sort of snowflake wrapped up in sugar." As she said the words her glance wandered. Loder saw it rest uninterestedly on a boy a yard or two in front of him, then move to the man over whose head he gazed, then lift itself inevitably to his face.

The glance was quick and direct. He saw the look of recognition spring across it; he saw her move forward suddenly as the crowd in the corridor parted to let her pass. Then he saw what seemed to him a miracle.

Her whole expression altered, her lips parted, and she colored with annoyance. She looked like a spoiled child who, seeing a bonbon box, opens it—to find it empty.

As the press about the doorway melted to give her passage the red-haired man in front of Loder was the first to take advantage of the space. "Jove, Lillian," he said, moving forward. "You look as if you expected Chilcote to be somebody else, and are disappointed to find he's only himself!" He laughed delightedly at his own joke.

The words were exactly the tone Lillian needed. She smiled her usual undisturbed smile as she turned her eyes upon him.

"My dear Leonard, you're using your eyeglass. When that happens you're never responsible for what you see." Her words came more slowly and with a touch of languid amusement. Her composure was suddenly restored.

Then for the first time Loder changed his position. Moved by an impulse he made no effort to dissect, he stepped back to Eve's side and slipped his arm through hers—successfully concealing his left hand.

The warmth of her skin through her long glove thrilled him unexpectedly. His impulse had been one of self-defense, but the result was of a different character. At the quick contact the wish to fight for—to hold and defend—the position that had grown so dear woke in renewed force. With a new determination he turned again toward Lillian.

"I caught the same impression—without an eyeglass," he said. "By did you look like that?" He asked the question steadily and with apparent carelessness, though through it all his reason stood aglance—his common sense cried aloud that it was impossible for the eyes that had seen his face in admiration, in love, in content, to fall now in recognition. The air seemed breathless while he spoke and waited. His impression of Lillian was a mere shimmering—was a mere consciousness of the pressure of her hand on Eve's arm and the warmth of her skin through her glove.

He was all raw and in a daze, but in spite of all I could do, I seemed to help me. I read out Doan's Kidney Pills and got the box of two boxes entirely cured me."

Many a reader of this in Union has gone through the self-same experience in part, and will be glad to be shown the way to get rid of the constant aches and pains of a bad back. Profit by a Union citizen's experience.

J. R. Porter, printer, employed on Progress, living on South Church St., Union, S. C., says: "I have never felt better in my life than I have since I used Doan's Kidney Pills. I was a great sufferer from backache for a number of years. My trouble was right across the small of my back and the lower part of my legs. It was so bad that I could not stand or walk. I was all raw and in a daze, but in spite of all I could do, I seemed to help me. I read out Doan's Kidney Pills and got the box of two boxes entirely cured me."

Remember the name—Doan's—and take no other.

Notice to Horse Breeders.

Brownstone, belonging to the Hackney Horse Breeders' association, will stand at Union, S. C., the following season. Terms as follows: \$5 down and \$20 to be paid if foal results. If not, \$5 will be refunded by the association. Horse will be found at Crawford & Aycock's stable, Union, S. C. 9-3m10.

Do you see what I mean, Eve?

Then abruptly the mist lifted. He saw Lillian's eyes—indifferent, amused, slightly contemptuous, and a second later he heard her voice.

"My dear Jack," she said sweetly, "how absurd of you! It was simply the contrast of your eyes peering over Leonard's hair. It was like a gorgeous sunset with a black cloud overhead." She laughed. "Do you see what I mean, Eve?" She affected to see Eve for the first time.

Eve had been looking calmly ahead. She turned now and smiled serenely. Loder felt no vibration of the arm he held, yet by an instant intuition he knew that the two women were antagonistic. He experienced it with the divination that follows upon a moment of acute suspense. He understood it, as he had understood Lillian's look of recognition when his forehead, eyes and nose had shown him to be himself; her blank surprise when his close shaven lip and chin had proclaimed him Chilcote.

[To Be Continued.]

Major Seely of the British army says that married soldiers are the bravest. Perhaps war does not seem like much of anything to them.

It might not be a bad idea to get the unwritten law into statutory shape so that it can be definitely relied on.

Every time an engineer resigns from the Panama canal work one Poultney Bigelow smiles grimly.

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Letters that Speak for Themselves.

Union, S. C., Feb. 5th, 1907.

Dr. Crimm: I am very sorry to have to say that the glasses I got from you do not suit me. I wore them all the time as you directed until my eyes pained me so badly that I was compelled to leave them off. I had a tired, drawing pain in both eyes, also a more acute pain in left eye. I read a little with both pairs on, but it always brings back the pain.

I intended going to your office when you were in Union last week but the weather was so bad I could not. Would have written sooner but thought I would try to hold off until you came to Union.

Will you be in Union again soon. If so, will you come out or shall I go to your office.

Yours truly,

(Miss) M. W. McBride.

Dear Sir:

Your letter received. On January 2nd a man came to my home, three miles east of Union, who said that he was Dr. Crimm and asked if I had seen his ad in the papers. He then asked to examine my eyes. Said that I was going blind but that he could fit me with glasses that would cure the catarract. Finally I decided to take his glasses, which he said should not be taken off only at night. Then he changed the glasses in the pair I had and said to wear both pairs when I read or sewed.

I have suffered more with my eyes since he was here than I had in five years before and should certainly have been blind had I continued to wear the glasses.

I do not remember his features distinctly. He was low and fair, young looking though perhaps forty. I think I should know him again.

Respectfully,

(Miss) M. W. McBride.

Union & Glenn Springs Railroad Company.

Schedule in effect January 13, 1907.

Between Union and Buffalo.

Morning.

No. 1 leaves Union 7:30 a. m., arrive at Buffalo 7:45 a. m.

No. 2 leaves Union 12:30 p. m., arrives at Buffalo 12:45 p. m.

No. 5 leaves Union 3:45 p. m., arrives at Buffalo 4:00 p. m.

No. 2 leaves Buffalo at 8:45 a. m., arrives at Union 9:00 a. m.

Evening.

No. 4 leaves Buffalo at 1:30 p. m., arrives at Union 1:45 p. m.

No. 6 leaves Buffalo at 4:45 p. m., arrives at Union 5:00 p. m.

Between Union and Pride.

Morning.

No. 34 leaves Union at 9:30; leaves Monarch 9:35; leaves Crawfords 9:40; leaves Gregory's 9:45; leaves Medors 9:50; leaves Neal Shoals 10:05; leaves Red Point 10:15; arrives at Pride 10:25 a. m.

No. 33 leaves Pride 10:55; leaves Red Point 11:05; leaves Neal Shoals 11:15; leaves Medors 11:25; leaves Gregory's 11:30; leaves Monarch 11:40; arrives at Union 11:50 a. m.

Evening.

No. 32 leaves Union 5:15; leaves Monarch 5:20; leaves Crawfords 5:25; leaves Gregory's 5:30; leaves Medors 5:35; leaves Neal Shoals 5:50; leaves Red Point 6:00; arrives at Pride 6:10 p. m.

No. 31 leaves Pride 6:40; leaves Red Point 6:50; leaves Neal Shoals 7:00; leaves Medors 7:10; leaves Gregory's 7:15; leaves Crawfords 7:20; leaves Monarch 7:25; arrives at Union 7:35 p. m.

J. R. DICKERT, G. M.

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