

THE Masquerader

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

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"The last three weeks must be buried," he said hurriedly. "No man could free himself suddenly from a vice." He broke off abruptly. He hated Chilcote; he hated himself. Then Eve's face, raised in distressed appeal, overshadowed all scruples. "You have been silent and patient for years," he said suddenly. "Can you be patient and silent a little longer?" He spoke without consideration. He was conscious of no selfishness beneath his words. In the first exercise of conscious strength the primitive desire to reduce all elements to his own sovereignty submerged every other emotion. "I can't enter into the thing," he said; "like you, I give no explanations. I can only tell you that on the day we talked together in this room I was myself—in the full possession of my reason, the full knowledge of my own capacities. The man you have known in the last three weeks, the man you have imagined in the last four years, is a shadow, an unreality—a weakness in human form. There is a new Chilcote—if you will only see him."

Eve was trembling as he ceased; her face was flushed; there was a strange brightness in her eyes. She was moved beyond herself.

"But the other you—the old you?" "You must be patient," he looked down into the fire. "Times like the last three weeks will come again—must come again; they are inevitable. When they do come, you must shut your eyes—you must blind yourself. You must ignore them—and me. Is it a compact?" He still avoided her eyes. She turned to him quietly. "Yes—if you wish it," she said, below her breath.

He was conscious of her glance, but he dared not meet it. He felt sick at the part he was playing, yet he held to it tenaciously.

"I wonder if you could do what few men and fewer women are capable of," he asked at last. "I wonder if you could learn to live in the present?" He lifted his head slowly and met her eyes. "This is an experiment," he went on. "And, like all experiments, it has good phases and bad. When the bad phases come round I want



"No, I haven't got the right," you to tell yourself that you are not altogether alone in your unhappiness—that I am suffering too—in another way."

There was silence when he had spoken, and for a space it seemed that Eve would make no response. Then the last surprise in a day of surprises came to him. With a slight stir, a slight, quick rustle of skirts, she stepped forward and laid her hand in his. The gesture was simple and very sweet. Her eyes were soft and full of light as she raised her face to his, her lips parted in unconscious appeal.

There is no surrender so seductive as the surrender of a proud woman. Loder's blood stirred, the undeniable suggestion of the moment thrilled and disconcerted him in a tumult of thought. Honor, duty, principle, rose in a triple barrier; but honor, duty and principle are but words to a headstrong man. The full significance of his position came to him as it had never come before. His hand closed on hers; he bent toward her, his pulses beating unevenly.

"Eve!" he said. Then at the sound of his voice he suddenly hesitated. It was the voice of a man who has forgotten everything but his own existence.

For an instant he stayed motionless. Then very quietly he drew away from her, releasing her hands.

"No," he said. "No, I haven't got the right."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THAT night for almost the first time since he had adopted his dual role Loder slept ill. He was not a man over whom imagination held any powerful sway. His doubts and misgivings seldom ran to speculation upon future possibilities. Nevertheless, the fact that conscious

ly or unconsciously, he had adopted a new attitude toward Eve came home to him with unpleasant force during the hours of darkness, and long before the first hint of daylight had slipped through the heavy window curtains he had arranged a plan of action—a plan wherein, by the simple method of altogether avoiding her, he might soothe his own conscience and safeguard Chilcote's domestic interests.

It was a satisfactory if a somewhat negative arrangement, and he rose next morning with a feeling that things had begun to shape themselves. But chance sometimes has a disconcerting knack of forestalling even our best planned schemes. He dressed slowly and descended to his solitary breakfast with the pleasant sensation of having put last night out of consideration by the turning over of a new leaf, but scarcely had he opened Chilcote's letters, scarcely had he taken a cursory glance at the morning's newspaper than it was borne in upon him that not only a new leaf, but a whole sheaf of new leaves, had been turned in his prospects by a hand infinitely more powerful and arbitrary than his own. He realized within the space of a few moments that the leisure Eve might have claimed, the leisure he might have been tempted to devote to her, was no longer his to dispose of, being already demanded of him from a quarter that allowed of no refusal.

For the first rumbling of the political earthquake that was to shake the country made itself audible beyond denial on that morning of March 27 when the news spread through England that, in view of the disorganized state of the Persian army and the shah's consequent inability to suppress the open insurrection of the border tribes in the northeastern districts of Meshed, Russia, with a great show of magnanimity, had come to the rescue by dispatching a large armed force from her military station at Merv across the Persian frontier to the seat of the disturbance.

To many hundreds of Englishmen who read their papers on that morning this announcement conveyed but little. That there is such a country as Persia we all know, that English interests predominate in the south and Russian interests in the north we have all superlatively understood from childhood, but in this knowledge, coupled with the fact that Persia is comfortably far away, we are apt to rest content. It is only to the eyes that see through long distance glasses, the minds that regard the present as nothing more or less than an inevitable link joining the future to the past, that this distant, debatable land stands out in its true political significance.

To the average reader of news the statement of Russia's move seemed scarcely more important than had the first report of the border risings in January, but to the men who had watched the growth of the disturbance it came charged with portentous meaning. Through the entire ranks of the opposition, from Fraide himself downward, it caused a thrill of expectation—that peculiar prophetic sensation that every politician has experienced at some moment of his career.

In no member of his party did this feeling strike deeper root than in Loder. Imbued with a lifelong interest in the eastern question, specially equipped by personal knowledge to hold and proclaim an opinion upon Persian affairs, he read the signs and portents with instinctive insight. Seated at Chilcote's table, surrounded by Chilcote's letters and papers, he forgot the breakfast that was slowly growing cold, forgot the interests and dangers, personal or pleasurable, of the night before, while his mental eyes persistently conjured up the map of Persia, traveling with steady deliberation from Merv to Meshed, from Meshed to Herat, from Herat to the empire of India! For it was not the fact that the Hazaras had risen against the shah that occupied the thinking mind, nor was it the fact that Russian and not Persian troops were destined to subdue them, but the deeply important consideration that an armed Russian force had crossed the frontier and was encamped within twenty miles of Meshed—Meshed, upon which covetous Russian eyes have rested ever since the days of Peter the Great.

So Loder's thoughts ran as he read and reread the news from the varying political standpoints, and so they continued to run when, some hours later, an urgent telephone message from the St. George's Gazette asked him to call at Lakeley's office.

The message was interesting as well as imperative, and he made an instant response. The thought of Lakeley's keen eyes and shrewd enthusiasms always possessed strong attractions for his own slower temperament, but even had this impetus been lacking, the knowledge that at the St. George's office, if anywhere, the true feelings of the party were invariably voiced would have drawn him without hesitation.

It was scarcely 12 o'clock when he turned the corner of the tall building, but already the keen spirit that Lakeley everywhere diffused was making itself felt. Loder smiled to himself as his eyes fell on the day's placards with their uncompromising headings and passed onward from the string of gay-

ly painted carts drawn up to receive their first consignment of the paper to the troop of eager newsboys passing in and out of the big swing doors with their piled up bundles of the early edition, and with a renewed thrill of anticipation and energy he passed through the doorway and ran upstairs. Passing unchallenged through the long corridor that led to Lakeley's office, he caught a fresh impression of action and vitality from the click of the tape machines in the subeditor's office, and a glimpse through the open door of the subeditors themselves, each occupied with his particular task; then without time for further observation he found himself at Lakeley's door. Without waiting to knock, as he had felt compelled to do on the one or two previous occasions that business had brought him there, he immediately turned the handle and entered the room.

Editors' offices differ but little in general effect. Lakeley's surroundings were rather more elaborate than is usual, as became the dignity of the oldest Tory evening paper, but the atmosphere was unmistakable. As Loder entered he glanced up from the desk at which he was sitting, but instantly returned to his task of looking through and making a pile of early evening editions that were spread around him. His coat was off and hung on the chair behind him, and he pulled vigorously on a long cigar.

"Hello! That's right," he said laconically. "Make yourself comfortable half a second, while I skim the St. Stephen's."

His salutation pleased Loder. With a nod of acquiescence he crossed the office to the brisk fire that burned in the grate.

For a minute or two Lakeley worked steadily, occasionally breaking the quiet by an unintelligible remark or a vigorous stroke of his pencil. At last he dropped the paper with a gesture of satisfaction and leaned back in his chair.

"Well," he said, "what d'you think of this? How's this for a complication?"

Loder turned round. "I think," he said quietly, "that we can't overestimate it."

Lakeley laughed and took a long pull at his cigar. "And we mustn't be afraid to let the Serbborough crowd know it, eh?" He waved his hand to the poster of the first edition that hung before his desk.

Loder, following his glance, smiled.

Lakeley laughed again. "They might have known it all along if they'd cared to deduce," he said. "Did they really believe that Russia was going to sit calmly looking across the Heri-Rud while the shah played at mobilizing? But what became of you last night? We had a regular prophesying of the whole business at Bramfell's; the great Fraide looked in for five minutes. I went on with him to the club, and he said 'Twas a great night!'"

Loder's face lighted up. "I can imagine it," he said, with an unusual touch of warmth.

Lakeley watched him intently for a moment. Then with a quick action he leaned forward and rested his elbows on the desk.

"It's going to be something more than imagination for you, Chilcote," he said impressively. "It's going to be solid earnest!" He spoke rapidly and with rather more than his usual shrewd decisiveness; then he paused to see the effect of his announcement.

Loder was still studying the flaring poster. At the other's words he turned sharply. Something in Lakeley's voice, something in his manner, arrested him. A tinge of color crossed his face.

"Reality?" he said. "What do you mean?"

For a further space his companion watched him, then with a rapid movement he tilted back his chair.

"Yes," he said. "Yes; old Fraide's instincts are never far out. He's quite right. You're the man!"

Still quietly, but with a strange underglow of excitement, Loder left the fire and, coming forward, took a chair at Lakeley's desk.

"Do you mind telling me what you're driving at?" he asked in his old, laconic voice.

Lakeley still scrutinized him with an air of brisk satisfaction; then with a gesture of finality he tossed his cigar away.

"My dear chap," he said, "there's going to be a breach somewhere—and Fraide says you're the man to step in and fill it! You see, five years ago, when things looked lively on the gulf and the Bundar Abbas business came to light, you did some promising work, and a reputation like that sticks to a man even when he turns slacker! I won't deny that you've slacked abominably," he added as Loder made an uneasy movement, "but slacking has different effects. Some men run to seed, others mature. I had almost put you down on the black list, but I've altered my mind in the last two months."

Again Loder stirred in his seat. A host of emotions were stirring in his mind. Every word wrung from Lakeley was another stimulus to pride, another subtle tribute to the curious force of personality.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

One is apt to discredit ghosts. One is apt to pooch the subject of spooks when the sun is high and there is plenty of company around, but this Brownsville affair seems to confirm belief that there are ghosts—ghosts that can shoot—a sort of bloodthirsty, riot raising ghosts.

The Rev. Dr. Washington Gladden should tackle General William Booth. Their respective views on the acceptability of tainted money are as wide apart as self denial and covetousness.

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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 Crawford 9:40;

leaves Gregory's 9:45; leaves Medors 9:55; leaves Neal Shoals 10:05; leaves Red Point 10:15; arrives at Pride 10:25 a. m.

No. 33 leaves Pride 10:35; leaves Red Point 11:05; leaves Neal Shoals 11:15; leaves Medors 11:25; leaves Gregory's 11:30; leaves Crawford 11:35; leaves Monarch 11:40; arrives at Union 11:50 a. m.

Evening.
No. 32 leaves Union 5:15; leaves Monarch 5:20; leaves Crawford 5:25;

leaves Gregory's 5:30; leaves Medors 5:40; 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 Crawford 7:20; leaves Monarch 7:25; arrives at Union 7:35 p. m.

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