

for the door. She had to pass close to where he stood. He joined her at once. "Whither away, Miss Firth?" "Oh, how do you do? I hadn't seen you. I was withering away for my chaperone. I can't struggle any longer with Monsieur Duber's English shot with French." "Will I do instead of him and instead of your chaperone?" "I had harboured thoughts of going. It's late and hot. But—" "But you'll harbour them no more. That is kind." He gave her his arm. "Mrs Firth is enjoying herself immensely. Depend upon it." "I'm here with Mrs Hardinge to-night."

She nodded her head in the direction of a young married woman in yellow satin talking to three men. Mrs Hardinge always enjoys herself immensely," he said. "Where are we going?" "To that seat on the landing for a little while, and a little air, if you will." "Yes, I will."

She had subdued her voice in talking to Hunter. As a rule it was a shade too high and staccato. He observed this; also, that she made no more allusions to departure. But he did not notice the symptoms of suppressed amusement that struggled in her face as she left the room with him.

When he looked at her again, in fact, her eyelids were heavily drooped. She raised them slowly, with a look of fatigued gratitude, as she leaned back against the cushions on the landing seat. He heard her sigh.

"This is better, isn't it?" he said. "Much better." She sighed again. "And what have you been doing since I last saw you—at the Richter?" he asked.

He had last seen her at the Thompsons, but she let that pass. "Oh, so much—and so little," she said, word wearily. "This new touch of sadness was not 'dams son' type. What did it mean? It made it a little difficult to talk the usual trifles. He knew that she must feel this, too, when she began to ask him about himself.

"And you?" she said. "What have you been doing? Tell me something very interesting."

He took the question seriously, and told her he had been in a despondent mood. She was very sympathetic. She, also, had been feeling simply suicidal of late. And then she began to draw him out, delicately—to ask him about his 'work' (he wrote little drawing-room 'chansonettes' now and then), about his ambitions, his travel in Japan, his singing. She listened attentively to all he said, and he said a good deal. What gorgeous eyes she had! But, far above all, what a charming and intelligent mind! And what hair!

Half an hour flew by. Mrs Hardinge appeared on the landing below. She was looking for somebody.

"Oh! I must go," said Miss Firth, gathering up the fan and the lace handkerchief from her lap. "It must be nearly to-morrow by now."

"Don't go yet," said Hunter. "I had counted on seeing you here to-night."

"Had you?" simply. "I came, really, to take this opportunity of bidding you good-by, Miss Firth."

"Good-by! What?—I don't understand."

"I am going away—abroad—perhaps to the East again."

He saw her fingers tighten on the fan. "This is very sudden," she said, in an altered voice. "For how long?"

"I may be back in a few months or a few years," he answered, watching her. She bit her underlip and her eyelids flickered. She laughed bitterly.

"Oh, how grateful you ought to be, you men! We poor women—"

She got up brusquely and her voice changed again to a forced stage calm. "I am dreadfully tired to-night, Mr Hunter. I don't know why. I must ask you to find Mrs Hardinge. Say I'm in the cloak room. I'll wait there."

"And what shall I say to you?" She looked up at him with a little helpless smile. "I hardly know. I—no. Good-night and good-by."

He raised a detaining hand. She gave him hers. It turned into an ordinary handshake; and before he could speak she had swept around once. He was slightly dazed.

When he got back into the crowd he forgot his message to Mrs Hardinge until she passed him in a few minutes and said, "Can you tell me where Miss Firth is?"

"Oh, I had a message. She's in the cloak room. She was tired. I was to tell you not to trouble—"

But she went down stairs at once. "Mrs Hardinge's carriage!" The two women entered.

"Well," began Mrs Hardinge, as soon as the carriage door was closed, "you seem to have a—mused yourself to-night, you naughty."

"Mollie, I've had such a joke. I could not resist it. Do listen. You know that lately Percy Hunter has been paying sort of half attentions to me 'entre autres.' Say you know."

"Of course."

"And the way he picks his steps, and shilly-shallies, and chaperones himself generally is too much for mortal woman. I had to see if I couldn't fool him into a little flutter—is there a man who can resist a few compliments laid on with discretion?—and oh! it was such a glorious success. When I think of his silly smile—Mollie."

And she laughed until her satin bodice creaked again. "Well, you're a nice little girl to take to a nice little party," said Mrs Hardinge,

catching the laughter. "Go on; tell more."

And Miss Firth gave a full description of what had taken place on the landing, with a really funny imitation of Hunter's voice and manner.

"His going away gave me such opportunities, you see," she wound up. "The worst is, he may want to go on with this game. But, after all, what is easier than to—"

"I don't know why on earth you don't take him when you've quite done fooling him about. He's good looking, and would not—"

"Is it likely that I would seriously consider that mix? But it's a refreshing change to score off that sort of man once in a way—calculating, careful, cucumber-headed prize that they are!"

And Hunter was saying to himself: By George! evidently gone deeper there than I had intended. Poor girl; shows one can't be careful enough. Well, it's fortunate for once, as it happens. Of course, I chuck Italy."

And in the end he married a very young girl, of the retiring violet type, from Yorkshire. Miss Firth had become Mrs Ormear Ellis. Dorothy had taken to wood carving and a poor girl's club in the Edgware Road. Her personal appearance is Mrs Dallas' despair.—"Black and White."

THE RULING PASSION.

The sufferer slowly raised his eyelids. "Where am I?" he asked. "You were run into by another bicyclist," answered the attendant.

Later, as he was about to breathe his last, he asked in a touching manner, "What was the name of his machine?"

PLAIN ENOUGH.

Tom: "Charlie Deadbroke married a very rich woman, didn't he?"

"Alice: 'I guess so. I heard the minister interpolate something in the service about the holy bonds and mortgages of matrimony.'"

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