

THE RING AND THE GLOVE.

I felt like Cortez upon a memorable occasion—when the jeweller's glass door swung behind me, and, marching up to the counter, I asked for a ring.

'A ring, sir?' said the attendant, a cockney to his finger tips. 'What sort of a ring?'

'An engagement ring,' said I, valorously.

'What size, sir?' demanded the man, docking me mentally.

'Five and a half,' I replied, thinking of the glove.

'That's rather an unusual size,' he remarked, rubbing one eyebrow, 'unless it's a bangle the lady wants.'

'I'm not sure that she wants it at all,' I murmured, producing the little sandalwood scented bit of silk, 'but that is the size, I think.'

'Oh—it's the size of the lady's and,' he observed with mild toleration, unrolling it. 'Well, sir, ladies' fingers vary in girth, and it's more usual to fit them with a piece of cardboard, but we'll do our best.'

'Could not the member be reconstituted?' I asked impressively.

That knocked the conceit out of him; he stared at me helplessly.

'Fill it with powder or something,' I explained.

It took him five minutes' self discipline to grasp the startling novelty, but he did, and, under my direction, filled the third finger sheath with plate powder, which I rammed home with my pencil case. Then, producing a miniature calliper, he took measurements and began to search his scintillating stock, displaying a reverent familiarity most impressive to behold. Cleopatra, how they dazzled! Pearls, rubies, emeralds, diamonds, each challenging the admiration, but checking the desire by the narrow parchment slip attached setting forth the price. Forty pounds, £50, £100; it was a charmed place, where money lost its everyday significance, for what man of spirit would be content to offer the girl of his heart a thing costing a miserable tanner when close beside it twinkled a rose diamond worth a wilderness of 'monkeys'? I felt almost pauperized, recollecting that I had only £75 available from the Derby hundred.

'Now, sir, what do you think of this?' asked the shopman patronizingly, as he displayed an opal changeable as the shifting sunlight on a misty sea. 'It's exactly the lady's size, mak-

ing allowances, for, of course, she won't want to wear it over 'er glove.'

'Are not opals unlucky?' said I, endeavouring to decipher the price.

'Oh, we don't hold with such superstition,' replied the jeweller loftily, 'but they do say one will keep you from being poisoned.'

'Then I shall leave it for the next rich widow,' I answered. 'But what is the cost of this?'

I alluded to an emerald set amid pearls, which I already saw glittering on the loveliest hand in the world. He extracted it with a silent respect he borrowed from my eagerness, and made a measurement while I watched him, my heart beating madly. The size was exactly the same; the price—but that is a detail. I decided upon it. The shopman thanked me perfumingly and I leaned against the counter, feeling like one who had received a great favour. But when I fumbled in my pocket for the notes and heard their crisp crackle my confidence returned, and then, as I watched the splendid thing flashing in its violet bed I believed I must after all be a rich man, unknown to myself, so great was the suggestion of unlimited wealth thus conveyed.

'I should like a piece of glass on the inside of the case lid,' I observed carelessly. 'Is it usual?'

'That's looking glass?' queried the lapidary, glancing up from a surreptitious examination of the notes.

I nodded. I knew I must be getting red.

'Well,' he remarked tolerantly, 'it's not exactly usual, but it's a pretty idea—lightens the attraction of the gem, makes the lady see the present from two points of view.'

'Hardly an advantage sometimes,' I observed, 'but can you do it?'

'Well, yes, I should think,' he replied condescendingly.

'Then get it done, and I shall stand the racket!' I answered magnificently.

He hurried away to effect the alteration, his place being taken by a bald headed salesman who wore spectacles, and talked to me over them soothingly, as one would to a person of weak intellect, while I formulated piratical schemes and asked him puerile questions with a gravity equalling his own.

When I left the shop I headed straight for Bloomsbury Square, but remembering that she might be just then occupied by domestic duties, decided to call later in the day. Even the ring in my pocket gave me no additional courage, and presently I began to think it was not quite royal enough. Edging my way to Regent's Park, I hunted out a quiet spot and sat down to examine it at leisure. It was glorious still, but somehow not so glorious as I could have wished, and I was actually questioning the wisdom of my choice when an approaching footfall made me close the case. It was light, though firm, and the everlasting flint would have worn well beneath it. Something, more of the intellect than of the sense, made me look up, and I saw her.

The sensation of being shot through the heart has not, I believe, received adequate literary expression, those who experience it being usually preoccupied at the exact moment with other matters; but I think I know what it means. She stopped, and we gazed at each other. She was in deep black, but the pallor had gone from her oval cheeks. She made me a half-tentative bow. I sprang to my feet.

'I'm so glad to see you,' I cried, 'because—I want to restore some thing you forgot in the restaurant yesterday—a few weeks ago.'

'How kind of you!' she said, coming near.

'Oh, not at all,' I replied; 'but I hope you were not inconvenienced. I should have sent it, but I— I didn't.'

I put my hand in my pocket hurriedly, and extracted my handkerchief, which in turn brought to light a sheaf of letters and memoranda. I shook out at her feet like a skillful conjurer. Then I tried the other pocket, but vainly. 'It's a glove,' I said weakly, gathering up my belongings, 'one of yours, don't you know?'

'I recollect—I missed it,' she said coldly.

'But the cab went so quickly,' I pleaded; 'ah, do sit down until I find it!'

She did so. I was in a gentle perspiration.

'Pray do not take so much trouble,' she murmured, plaintively.

'Hurrah, I have it!' I cried, and I extracted the wisp of silk from my

watch pocket, where I had thrust it on leaving the shop.

'So kind of you,' she observed, taking it. Then the powder ran over her dress.

'How stupid!' I gasped, completely demoralized now, and retaking the glove I shook it vigorously until I had created a miniature dust storm. She sneezed. I devoutly wished that the flying machine was an accomplished fact.

'It's ruined,' I muttered woefully, for it certainly presented a piebald appearance.

She smiled. I sat down, saying desperately—

'Would you allow me to keep it—the thing is of no use now?'

'Why?' she answered quietly; but the voice was low.

'To remind me of that happy day,' I replied, shyly.

'Indeed? I am glad that you think of it as a pleasant one,' she said graciously. 'Mr Turnbull was declaiming all the way back in the cab. He seemed prejudiced against you.'

'He may be described as a man who means well,' I observed severely. 'I hope he said something actionable.'

'Oh, hardly that!' she answered laughingly; 'but he seems to have changed his opinion lately. Your name happened to come up in conversation to-day, and he said—'

She paused; a sudden flame leaped into her cheeks.

'What did he say?' I demanded, trying to look away.

'He said you were an honourable man,' she replied, the point of her

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extracted the wisp of silk from my