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AND so, once again, the woman conquered. Whatever Eve's intentions were, whatever she wished to evade or ward off, she was successful in gaining her end. For more than two hours she kept Loder at her side. There may have been moments in those two hours when the tension was high, when the efforts she made to interest and hold him were somewhat strained. But if this was so, it escaped the notice of the one person concerned; for it was long after tea had been served, long after Eve had offered to do penance for her monopoly of him by driving him to Chilcote's club, that Loder realized with any degree of distinctness that it was she and not he who had taken the lead in their interview; that it was she and not he who had bridged the difficult silences and given a fresh direction to dangerous channels of talk. It was long before he recognized this; but it was still longer before he realized the far more potent fact that, without any coldness, without any lessening of the subtle consideration she always showed him, she had given him no further opportunity of making love.

Talking continuously, elated with the sense of conflict still to come, he drove with her to the club. Considering that drive in the light of after events, his own frame of mind invariably filled him with incredulity.

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In the eyes of any sane man his position was not worth an hour's purchase; yet in the blind self-confidence of the moment he would not have changed places with Fraide himself. The great song of Self was sounding in his ears as he drove through the crowded streets, conscious of the cool, crisp air, of Eve's close presence, of the numberless infinitesimal things that went to make up the value of life. It was this acknowledgment of personality that upheld him; the personality, the power that had carried him unswervingly through eleven colorless years; that had impelled him towards this new career when the new career had first been opened to him; that had hewn a way for him in this fresh existence against colossal odds. The indomitable force that had trampled out Chilcote's footmarks in public life, in private life—in love. It was a triumphant paean that clamored in his ears, something persistent and prophetic with an undernote of menace. The cry of the human soul that has dared to stand alone.

His glance was keen and bright as he waited for a moment at the carriage door and took Eve's hand before entering the club.

"You're dining out to-night?" he said. His fingers, always tenacious and masterful, continued to hold hers. The compunction that had driven him temporarily towards sacrifice had passed. His pride, his confidence, and with them his desire, had flowed back in full measure.

Eve, watching him attentively, paled a little. "Yes," she said, "I'm dining with the Bramfells."

"What time will you get home?" He scarcely realized why he put the question. The song of Self

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still sounded triumphantly, and he responded without reflection.

His eyes held hers, his fingers pressed her hand; the intense mastery of his will passed through her in a sudden sense of fear. Her lips parted in deprecation, but he—closely attentive of her expression—spoke again quickly.

"When can I see you?" he asked, very quietly.

Again she was about to speak. She leaned forward, as if some thought long suppressed trembled on her lips; then her courage or her desire failed her. She leaned back, letting her lashes droop over her eyes. "I shall be home at eleven," she said below her breath.

Loder dined with Lakely at Chilcote's club; and so absorbing were the political interests of the hour—the resignation of Sir Robert Sefborough, the King's summoning of Fraide, the probable features of the new ministry—that it was after nine o'clock when at last he freed himself and drove to the "Arcadian" Theatre.

The sound of music came to him as he entered the theatre—light, measured music suggestive of tiny streams, toy lambs, and painted shepherdesses. It sounded singularly inappropriate to his mood—as inappropriate as the theatre itself with its gay gilding, its pale tones of pink and blue. It was the setting of a different world—a world of laughter, light thoughts, and shallow impulses, in which he had no part. He halted for an instant outside the box to which the attendant had shown him; then, as the door was thrown open, he straightened himself resolutely and stepped forward.

It was the interval between the first and second acts.

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The box was in shadow, and Loder's first impression was of voices and rustling skirts, broken in upon by the murmur of frequent, amused laughter; later, as his eyes grew accustomed to the light, he distinguished the occupants—two women and a man. The man was speaking as he entered, and the story he was relating was evidently interesting from the faint exclamations of question and delight that punctuated it in the listeners' higher, softer voices. As the new-comer entered they all three turned and looked at him.

"Ah, here comes the legislator!" exclaimed Leonard Kaine. For it was he who formed the male element in the party.

"The Revolutionary, Lennie!" Lillian corrected, softly. "Bramfell says he has changed the whole face of things—" She laughed softly and meaningly as she closed her fan. "So good of you to come, Jack!" she added. "Let me introduce you to Miss Esseltyn; I don't think you two have met. This is Mr. Chilcote, Mary—the great, new Mr. Chilcote." Again she laughed.

Loder bowed and moved to the front of the box, nodding to Kaine as he passed.

"It's only for an hour," he explained to Lillian. "I have an appointment for eleven." He turned and bowed to the third occupant of the box—a remarkably young and well-dressed girl with wide-awake eyes and a *retroussé* nose.

"Only an hour! Oh, how unkind! How should I punish him, Lennie?" Lillian looked round at Kaine with a lingering, caressing glance.

He bent towards her in quick response and answered in a whisper.

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She laughed and replied in an equally low tone.

Loder, to whom both remarks had been inaudible, dropped into the vacant seat beside Mary Esseltyn. He had the unsettled feeling that things were not falling out exactly as he had calculated.

"What is the play like?" he hazarded as he looked towards his companion. At all times social trivialities bored him; to-night they were intolerable. He had come to fight, but all at once it seemed that there was no opponent. Lillian's attitude disturbed him; her careless graciousness, her evident ignoring of him for Kaine, might mean nothing—but also it might mean much.

So he speculated as he put his question and spurred his attention towards the girl's answer; but with the speculation came the resolve to hold his own—to meet his enemy upon whatever ground she chose to appropriate.

The girl looked at him with interest. She, too, had heard of his triumph.

"It is a good play," she responded. "I like it better than the book. You've read the book, of course?"

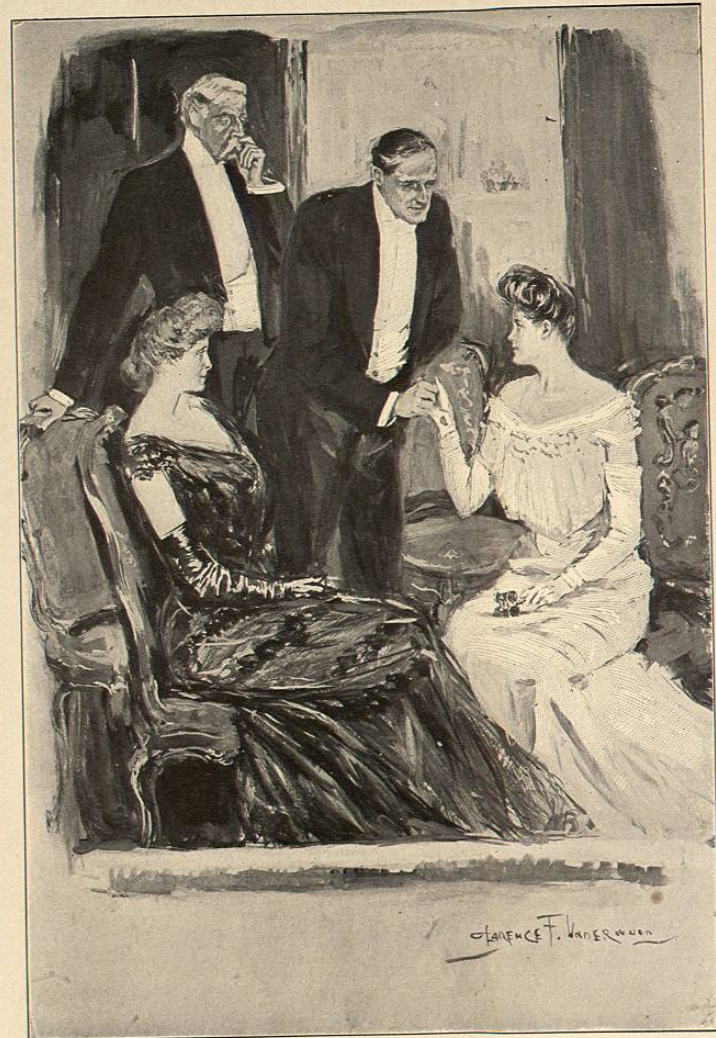
"No." Loder tried hard to fix his thoughts.

"It's amusing—but far-fetched."

"Indeed?" He picked up the programme lying on the edge of the box. His ears were strained to catch the tone of Lillian's voice as she laughed and whispered with Kaine.

"Yes; men exchanging identities, you know."

He looked up and caught the girl's self-possessed glance. "Oh?" he said. "Indeed?" Then again he looked away. It was intolerable this feeling of being



"THIS IS MR. CHILCOTE, MARY"

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caged up! A sense of anger crept through his mind. It almost seemed that Lillian had brought him there to prove that she had finished with him—had cast him aside, having used him for the day's excitement as she had used her poodles, her Persian cats, her crystal-gazing. All at once the impotency and uncertainty of his position goaded him. Turning swiftly in his seat, he glanced back to where she sat, slowly swaying her fan, her pale, golden hair and her pale-colored gown delicately silhouetted against the background of the box.

"What's your idea of the play, Lillian?" he said, abruptly. To his own ears there was a note of challenge in his voice.

She looked round languidly. "Oh, it's quite amusing," she said. "It makes a delicious farce—absolutely French."

"French?"

"Quite. Don't you think so, Lennie?"

"Oh, quite," Kaine agreed.

"They mean that it's so very light—and yet so very subtle, Mr. Chilcote," Mary Esseltyn explained.

"Indeed?" he said. "Then my imagination was at fault. I thought the piece was serious."

"Serious!" Lillian smiled again. "Why, where's your sense of humor? The motive of the play debars all seriousness."

Loder looked down at the programme still between his hands. "What is the motive?" he asked.

Lillian waved her fan once or twice, then closed it softly. "Love is the motive," she said.

Now the balancing—the adjusting of impression and inspiration—is, of all processes in life, the most delicately fine. The simple sound of the word "love" com-

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ing at that precise juncture changed the whole current of Loder's thought. It fell like a seed; and like a seed in ultra-productive soil, it bore fruit with amazing rapidity.

The word itself was small and the manner in which it was spoken trivial, but Loder's mind was attracted and held by it. The last time it had met his ears his environment had been vastly different; and this echo of it in an uncongenial atmosphere stung him to resentment. The vision of Eve, the thought of Eve, became suddenly dominant.

"Love?" he repeated, coldly. "So love is the motive?"

"Yes." This time it was Kaine who responded in his methodical, contented voice. "The motive of the play is love, as Lillian says. And when was love ever serious in a three-act comedy—on or off the stage?" He leaned forward in his seat, screwed in his eye-glass, and lazily scanned the stalls.

The orchestra was playing a Hungarian dance—its erratic harmonies and wild alternations of expression falling abruptly across the pinks and blues, the gilding and lights of the pretty, conventional theatre. Something in the suggestion of unfitness appealed to Loder. It was the force of the real as opposed to the ideal. With a new expression on his face, he turned again to Kaine.

"And how does it work?" he said. "This treatment that you find so—French?"

His voice as well as his expression had changed. He still spoke quietly, but he spoke with interest. He was no longer conscious of his vague and uneasiness; a fresh chord had been struck in his mind, and his curiosity had responded to it. For the first time it oc-

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curred to him that love—the dangerous, mysterious garden whose paths had so suddenly stretched out before his own feet—was a pleasure-ground that possessed many doors—and an infinite number of keys. He was stirred by the desire to peer through another entrance than his own, to see the secret, alluring byways from another stand-point. He waited with interest for the answer to his question.

For a second or two Kaine continued to survey the house; then his eye-glass dropped from his eye and he turned round.

"To understand the thing," he said, pleasantly, "you must have read the book. Have you read the book?"

"No, Mr. Kaine," Mary Esseltyn interrupted, "Mr. Chilcote hasn't read the book."

Lillian laughed. "Outline the story for him, Lennie," she said. "I love to see other people taking pains."

Kaine glanced at her admiringly. "Well, to begin with," he said, amiably, "two men, an artist and a millionaire, exchange lives. See?"

"You may presume that he does see, Lennie."

"Right! Well, then, as I say, these beggars change identities. They're as like as pins; and to all appearances one chap's the other chap—and the other chap's the first chap. See?"

Loder laughed. The newly quickened interest was enhanced by treading on dangerous ground.

"Well, they change for a lark, of course, but there's one fact they both overlook. They're men, you know, and they forget these little things!" He laughed delightedly. "They overlook the fact that one of 'em has got a wife!"

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There was a crash of music from the orchestra. Loder sat straighter in his seat; he was conscious that the blood had rushed into his face.

"Oh, indeed?" he said, quickly. "One of them had a wife?"

"Exactly!" Again Kaine chuckled. "And the point of the joke is that the wife is the least larky person under the sun. See?"

A second hot wave passed over Loder's face; a sense of mental disgust filled him. This, then, was the wonderful garden seen from another stand-point! He looked from Lillian, graceful, sceptical, and shallow, to the young girl beside him, so frankly modern in her appreciation of life. This, then, was love as seen by the eyes of the world—the world that accepts, judges, and condemns in a slang phrase or two! Very slowly the blood receded from his face.

"And the end of the story?" he asked, in a strained voice.

"The end? Oh, usual end, of course. Chap makes a mess of things and the bubble bursts."

"And the end of the wife?"

"The end of the wife?" Lillian broke in, with a little laugh. "Why, the end of all stupid people who, instead of going through life with a lot of delightfully human stumbles, come just one big cropper. She naturally ends in the divorce court!"

They all laughed boisterously. Then laughter, story, and dénouement were all drowned in a tumultuous crash of music. The orchestra ceased; there was a slight hum of applause; and the curtain rose on the second act of the comedy.

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A FEW minutes before the curtain fell on the second act of "Other Men's Shoes" Loder rose from his seat and made his apologies to Lillian.

At any other moment he might have pondered over her manner of accepting them—the easy indifference with which she let him go. But vastly keener issues were claiming his attention, issues whose results were wide and black.

He left the theatre, and, refusing the overtures of cabmen, set himself to walk to Chilcote's house. His face was hard and emotionless as he hurried forward, but the chaos in his mind found expression in the unevenness of his pace. To a strong man the confronting of difficulties is never alarming and is often fraught with inspiration; but this applies essentially to the difficulties evolved through the weakness, the folly, or the force of another; when they arise from within the matter is of another character. It is in presence of his own soul—and in that presence alone—that a man may truly measure himself.

As Loder walked onward, treading the whole familiar length of traffic-filled street, he realized for the first time that he was standing before that solemn tribunal—that the hour had come when he must answer to himself for himself. The longer and deeper an oblivion the more painful the awakening. For months the