

A Thief in Society

A hansom drew up with a clatter. Before the footman could approach the doors swung outward, and in a flurry of furs and silken skirts a tall young woman shot out of it. Then, handing a reckless donation to the grinning Jehu, she swept into the doors of her chic little club and peered into the smoking room. It was empty. Miss Portal stood for a second nervously upon the threshold, then pushed inside and dug herself on one of the lounges, whose tall back obscured her from sight. She pressed a button and a puffed magazine toward her, lit a cigarette with the same restless activity, and began to smoke in hurried puffs. When the maid entered to take her order, the start Miss Portal gave spoke badly for her nerves.

The soft-footed attendant departed to reappear with a glass of something gold and sparkling, the glass being deposited on the table beside Miss Portal's elbow, the maid withdrew and left the young lady to her reflections.

Not very pleasant ones, to judge from the restless eyes and twitching fingers, or else the magazine was uninspiring. Certainly it soon dropped from the languid grasp that held it, and Miss Portal gave herself up to thought. So lost was she that the entry of more members escaped her notice: it was only when a name struck on her attention that she realized two women had taken their seats just behind the lounge. They were talking of the Charity Fete, which had been the sensation of Mayfair a week or so ago. The cigarette fell from the listener's fingers. She held her breath, afraid to stir. "My dear, it's perfectly disgraceful. I know how well they sold. Why, the men were giving sovereigns for a single flower; and you know those great rose trees the duchess sent? well, every one of them went, and I know how much for, because Mary bought one, and she paid twenty guineas for hers. As there were a dozen, that makes two hundred and twenty—"

"But they mightn't all have fetched the same."

"You don't find Mary giving a penny more than she was forced to. And then there were those Japanese trees. I saw Lord Hugh with one: he'd pay. Oh, there can't be a doubt of it. Why, Winifred Portal herself sold at least three basketfuls of buttonholes, and from the way the men flocked round her, I should say she was doing enormously."

"It was her stall, wasn't it?"

"I'm not certain. Lady Mary had a lot to do with it. I don't know whom they can go for—"

"I heard Lady Mary herself asked to have the matter taken up." The voice had sunk to a whisper. "They say she's awfully upset about it."

"Yes, she's going about saying she knows at least a hundred more ought to have been handed in, if not two!"

"Good gracious! I didn't know it was so definite as that. But who else handled the money?"

"Miss Portal!"

"How awful! I can't believe it. She's very loud, but then, the men have spoiled her. It must be hard to keep your head straight when you're so attractive. When she comes into a room there's a magnificent opulence about her that quite bewitches. And her eyes!"

"But she hasn't a penny, and her gown—"

"I thought she'd hooked a manufacturer. They say he's rolling—"

"I dunno. There was some talk of Bertie. Not that I think she'd be so silly. Still, this will queer her even for that. Poor old Bertie! He adores her." "You think it will come out then?" "Lady Mary swears she'll—"

"Is that one! Good heavens! I'm lurching out at Kensington. Can I drop you?"

There was a rustling, a confused murmur, the banging of a door, and silence.

Miss Portal sat quite still, gazing into the empty fireplace. Outside, the faint sounds of the gay spring traffic stole in through an opened window. There was no color in Miss Portal's face; she looked drawn and old—horribly old. She sat there till the clock ticked forward twenty minutes; then rose, cautiously even now, and waited listening at the door before she opened it. The hall was empty; she hurried across to the telephone desk.

"114 Central. Hello! Was Mr. Sparkes in? Could she be put through to his desk? Miss Portal. Was that him? Yes. Could he give her three minutes this afternoon, any time before three, if possible? No; she would rather come down to his office. No; she could not lunch. Three o'clock then."

She went out to lunch as she thought it would be a good way to soothe her nerves. She emerged from the restaurant feeling more composed, and had a hansom driven on to the Carlton. She wondered if there were constraints in her husband's greeting. Miss Portal had an exquisite amount of pick. The sound of the door opening and the sight of the maid's face as she came in to take her order.

It was over! Accounts made her head swim, and she was so careless. Only that morning her maid had brought her a fresh lot of money twisted up in newspaper, discovered in a reticule she'd brought from Molly's stall. Heaps and heaps—a hundred pounds at least. She must have stuck it there and forgotten it. Really, she wasn't fitted for a shop-keeper. She did it very well; so well that suddenly the strained atmosphere around her melted; suddenly she was again among applauding friends. Then the clock chimed the half hour she rose, released. She had burned her boats behind her. A hundred pounds must be procured before that night. Her explanation would be over London by the evening. Miss Portal had no false modesty about the interest which people took in her.

She leaned back in the hansom and stared with unseeing eyes as she was carried to the city. A hundred pounds! And bondage.

Mr. Sparkes's office was up two flights of stairs. She paused, sick at heart, before the door, then saw a vision of a boy's white face, drawn and horrified—as his would be if



REGAINING HER COMPOSURE.

the dark shadow that was threatening fell on her—and drew her head up proudly. She had been a fool; now she must pay. Pay anything, as the price of silence.

Into the mahogany-furnished room advanced Miss Portal. Mr. Sparkes was in, and expecting her. She passed through into his private room. Confession is good for the soul, but a painful process. Miss Portal did not hedge; she spoke with uncompromising candor. Mr. Sparkes had asked her to marry him three days ago; she had refused him. She was prepared now to give the decision he wanted if he would lend her one hundred pounds in cash this moment. She had called early, before the banks closed. An astonishingly businesslike young woman, whose composure was belied perhaps by the unnatural sparkle in her eyes. The averted face of the man before her scrutinized her somewhat warily. The matter-of-fact way in which Miss Portal offered her beautiful self for sale did not reassure him, neither did the low figure she had put upon the purchase. James Sparkes came from the provinces and was proportionately cautious. The dashing Winifred, guessing it in aristocratic ballrooms had seemed an alluring figure to the man of millions. The bright-eyed, white-cheeked woman who sat before him in his office was quite another person. Something of what was passing through his mind showed itself in his demeanor.

"This is a queer start, Miss Portal. A hundred pounds isn't much as the price of marriage to a man you loathe. You were definite enough when I asked you the other day. What's up?"

"It is a woman's privilege to change her mind. I value the security perhaps. And I—I am in need of help. If you will give it—"

"But why?"

"Won't it suffice that I am in trouble? It is a private matter—a debt—"

Miss Portal's cheeks were flushing ominously. It was not so easy as she had thought. She had imagined the man would be subdued, abashed, an awkward slave, as he had been when he asked her, habitually, to grant him the honor of her hand. But this keen-eyed, suspicious man of business was horribly unlike the Mr. Sparkes who blundered through Mayfair drawing rooms.

"Guess there should be no private matters between man and wife. I see you're in trouble—pretty big trouble—to come to seek me in this fashion. I must know what that trouble is." "Can't you take my word that I—I want the money—terribly?" Mr. Sparkes lay back in his chair, one hand stroking his chin. Then deliberately shook his head.

"No. We're entering into a pretty serious thing in marriage. You told me you were in love with some one else, and that pretty well knocked the fancy I had for you off the spot. You told me as though I were a promising puppy to take his

spoke to you at all. Now you come running up at heel, offering yourself, eating humble pie. No, sir. Something pretty stiff has happened, and I must know what it is before you get the money."

"If I tell you, will you give it me?"

A momentary hesitation, then slowly: "The money? If it's the truth—yes."

Miss Portal took a little breath, and lifted her head with a terrible calmness. "I was selling at the Charity Fete. I got wrong in my accounts. I—I suppose you call it embezzling. Well, I had to pay a bridge debt, and there seemed such a lot of money and no check, so I took some. I want to give it back because I won't pretend my conscious pricks me, but they suspect. I've got to pay it back to-night."

The voice ceased speaking; the room seemed full of quivering, dreadful silence. Mr. Sparkes took up the receiver from his desk.

"Hello! Marshall. Send round to the bank. I want a hundred pounds. Yes. Send some one for the check. Gold, silver and a little copper. You can get some fivers and a tenner. Yes; at once."

A discreet clerk appeared, and withdrew bearing the check. Miss Portal felt something rising in her throat, a hysterical, choking something, she did not know if it was relief or terror. Only she dreaded the next words. But Mr. Sparkes continued silence. It was for her to speak.

"I don't know how to thank you. I—I am prepared to keep my word—"

She was rising, trying to collect her smiles again. The sight of the man in the swing chair sickened her, but she faced him bravely. How solid his comfortable form, how creased and round his shoulders, how red and expressionless his face!

"You'll keep your word, eh? That means marry me?"

"But what about me? I asked a girl whom I respected to do me the honor of being my wife. I didn't ask a thief!"

"I don't want the honor of your hand, Miss Portal. I'll choose my wife from a good house, not from the dock. That's where you ought to be this moment."

Somewhere in the room the sunbeams danced blindingly.

"I told you in confidence. You—you could not tell!"

"I Lord, no. Only you spoke as if I were a dog three days ago. Think what you are to-day, my dear. A thief, come to sell herself to escape her punishment. That's what you're offering as my wife. That's what I say ain't good enough. Here's the money!"

A knock. Some one entered and departed. Miss Portal still stood white and frozen.

"There you are. Take it, and bless your stars you've got off scot-free."

"Scot-free?"

"Oh, I've been a bit plain-spoken, eh? Not such a soft job as you fancied! You've got the money, but you've got some plain words with it." "D'you think I haven't faced that risk. D'you think I didn't know how you would triumph? It was because I knew the glorious revenge that I was putting in your hand that I came to you. I was sure you'd pay for it."

"Eh?"

It was Mr. Sparkes's turn to look astounded.

Quickly the words pelted forth. "I thought you'd take me. I—faced even that. This isn't worse. Good heavens! This isn't worse."

With a sob, Miss Portal had turned downward. Mr. Sparkes rose with unexpected swiftness and confronted her.

"Stop a bit. I don't quite understand. You loathe me. I can see it. Yet you offer yourself for my triumph and a hundred pounds. You've hosts of friends—Lady Mary, your aunt, the man you say you love. In a plight as critical as yours why didn't you go to one of them?"

"Because I could not let him know! If he had known it might have got to his ears; oh! it would. They talk so. But you—you don't mix with them. I knew I should bury my secret if I came to you, even if I buried myself."

The words died passionately. A haggard face looked into the astonished one in front of her; then with a sudden movement, Miss Portal trembled and collapsed into the nearest chair, sobbing weakly.

A firm hand came down on her shoulder, not unkindly.

"Steady there. I can't have this in business hours. This is an office. Steady now."

Miss Portal made an effort and dabbed the tears off forcibly.

"Come, that's better. Pull yourself together. You're brave enough, dashed brave. By gad! think how you faced the idea of me. I hope he's worthy of you, that's all."

"Worthy of me?" Miss Portal shrank back, white.

Mr. Sparkes took up the bag with old-fashioned politeness.

"Miss Portal, I've done you a wrong, and I'm glad to own it, for it shows my judgment wasn't so much as fault after all. I thought you a thoroughbred, and you are that, though you've fallen. Slips will happen, and we're none of us beyond them. You made a big mistake, but you've kept some sense of honor. You were prepared to sacrifice yourself to it, good and hard. I dunno as things have been particularly flattering to me, but it's something

to feel you trust me to keep my mouth shut."

Mr. Sparkes had moved toward the door. Miss Portal still stood, bag in hand looking at him.

"A sense of honor? Eh? A thief?"

"That's enough! Don't think too much about it. You came to bury your mistake, or fault, or what you like, and it's buried—here!" Mr. Sparkes slapped his broad chest comfortably. "I don't talk. You're right there. And the little check's no more to me than a drop in the tank. So good-by, Miss Portal, and if you'll take my advice you won't breathe a word of this to Mr. What's-his-name. Start clear."

People had called Miss Portal hard. They would not have recognized the tender, melting face illuminated with a flood of joy and gratitude. Tears shone still in the blue eyes; the red mouth trembled. The assured young woman had vanished; in her stead stood a woman, grateful, wholly humble, a woman who caught hold of Mr. Sparkes's hand and held it passionately. "How can I thank you! Oh, how can I thank you! Not only for saving me from disgrace, but for something more, far more than that—my self respect."

Miss Portal dropped the hand abruptly, drew her veil down, and blundered through the door.

The hansom started down the narrow lane and stopped jangling by the roadside. Some one was running after it. Miss Portal leaned over the door and came face to face with Mr. Sparkes, red and panting.

"You forgot the money, my dear," he gasped.

Miss Portal stretched her hand out, and received it with a foolish little laugh. Mr. Sparkes still lingered on the curbstone. At the street corner a girl was selling daffodils and tulips. The flowers made a happy splash of color against the roaring traffic. The air was full of whispering spring songs, and the wind was laden with a thousand perfumes caught from far-off forests, fraught with the season's gaiety and erstwhile with its melancholy.

The beautiful face looked down at Mr. Sparkes, successful manufacturer aged forty. He stood bareheaded, a stout and prosy figure, yet Romance flitted round him, and shed her golden light on him that moment, making him a seeming Perseus.

Andromeda put forth her hand gratefully once more.

"Ah, my dear," said Mr. Sparkes. "You've given me back something, too; something you took away from me and which I wanted."

The smile played round his mouth, waggishly. Then Mr. Sparkes stepped back and nodded to the driver, and before the girl could question the hansom shot onward into the city street.

Mr. Sparkes stood gazing after it; he turned round with a little sigh. Spring brings its twinge of madness, even to manufacturers.

"Good-by, my dear," said he; "and thank you for what you've given back to me, that something which your naughty words had hurt a good deal, lady mine. But I've got it safe again. My ideal!"

Then Mr. Sparkes, with becoming shame, ran into his office and stalked with prodigious stances back into his private room.—The Ladies' Realm.

Lore of the Cradle.

In many parts of the kingdom it is considered extremely unlucky to rock or set in motion an empty cradle. In some districts, however, the saying goes that:

"If ye rock the cradle empty, Then ye shall have babies plenty."

The Sabbath day as birthday is said to confer all the virtues on an infant in addition to good looks, which alone are allotted to Monday's child. The chief characteristic of Tuesday's child is grace, while a happy disposition will belong to Wednesday's child. Woe is in store for the infant born on Thursday, while Friday's child is destined to godly works. "Saturday's child must work for its living."

Very quaint is the idea that unless an infant goes higher, i. e., upstairs, before it goes lower it will never rise in the world. Under these circumstances, if the house possesses no upper staircase, wise old wives advise the nurse to take the infant in her arms and mount a chair or a pair of steps before she takes her predawn charge on its first journey into the outer world.

Reflections of a Bachelor.

That is calling a woman's red hair burnished gold and being sure she hears you.

The trouble with kissing a girl under an umbrella is she screams if it drips down her neck.

Most people take more credit to themselves over inherited money than if they earned it.

A woman is hardly ever happily married unless her husband will tell her he doesn't believe anybody else could dress as well on so little money.—New York Press.

Where Glacier Ice is Used.

Glacier ice is now delivered to some of the largest consumers of Lyons and other cities of Europe. There are so many railways in the Alps at present that it has been found profitable to gather this ice and transport it to the cities, where it is preferred to other ice because of its hardness and lasting qualities. This ice is blasted and mixed in the manner as stone is crushed.

A POWERFUL RIVAL

It was nearly 5 o'clock when the senior partner of the firm handed Esther another cylinder. "It's only a little letter," he said, "and I should like to have you transcribe it before you go home."

"Certainly, Mr. Hargraves," she returned, but the face she raised clouded slightly. Past experience had taught Esther what Mr. Hargraves meant by a "little letter," and it was not a hand of gentlemen that placed the cylinder on the mantel and closed the swing gate.

"I suppose after I get all through I'll hear. Make an extra carbon copy," she muttered to herself as she put the reproducer in position and the hearing tubes in her ears; but as she listened the frown disappeared and a smile took its place, for all she could hear at first was a confused jumbling of words. She was not much surprised, for many amusing things had happened in connection with the business phonograph since Hargraves & Blake had installed it in their office some two months before.

After puzzling over the matter for awhile she came to the conclusion that the jargon which met her ears was due to the fact that Mr. Hargraves had dictated over another

letter, which was already recorded on the cylinder. "That's just like him," she told herself in disgust. "Now, Mr. Blake would never think of doing such a thing."

With difficulty Esther transcribed the letter which Mr. Hargraves had dictated. Then she replaced the tubes in her ears, not that it was necessary, but for the simple reason that she was curious to know what else was on the cylinder. When transcribing Mr. Hargraves' letter she had followed his voice, paying no attention to the superfluous words in another's voice. For the time being Esther was oblivious to the fact that the hands on her watch were fast approaching 5:30.

When she had finished her task, which caused her not a little astonishment in the performing, the following broken sentences glowed from the sheet of paper: "I love you, Esther—I've always loved you, I think, but I haven't dared to hope that you returned my love—I'm dictating this on the end of a cylinder and nobody'll ever know what nonsense I'm saying—I want to hear how my own voice sounds when I tell you that I love you, Esther."

The girl took the paper from the typewriter rather guiltily, folded it and put it in her bag. "I know I shouldn't be glad," she whispered to herself, "but somehow I can't help feeling pleased that he cares for me." Esther had recognized the voice—that dictated those fervid sentences.

Just then Mr. Hargraves entered the office, and coming over to her desk he asked, "Have you finished the letter, Miss Stanley?"

"Yes," she answered briefly, conscious that her face was unnaturally flushed, and feeling very uncomfortable in consequence. "Here it is," she returned, "and I hope it's correct."

"The letter is all right," Mr. Hargraves said, after reading it through. "And that's all there is tonight, Miss Stanley."

All the way home on the cars Esther's thoughts centered upon the occurrence of the afternoon she was beside herself with joy and went far out of her way to stop at a certain old rickety house to have her fortune told.

In her room that evening she was unable to banish it from her mind. Finally she went over to the mantel and took down a photograph of a young man. "Do you know you have a rival," she said, "and a powerful rival, too?" Was it her fancy, or did the honest eyes which met hers hold a look of reproach? "But I won't forget," she went on. "How good you were to us when mother and I had come so many miles

from our dear old home to where there were only strangers. How glad we were to find an old friend here! And I'll not forget either when mother was taken ill, and after a few days I was left alone, how you comforted me in my sorrow. No, Dick, I'll not forget, a thousand times no. When he tells me what's in this paper, then I'll tell him of the good kind man I'm to marry, as soon as we get enough saved for a home, and I'm sure he won't feel bad if he knows I'm happy." Esther dashed away a tear. "Yes, I'm happy; of course, I'm happy, for Dick loves me; but I wish I didn't have to tell Mr. Blake—I love Dick; of course I do—dear old Dick—I'll be true to him through everything."

Slowly she crossed to the other side of the room, and with a gentle hand replaced the photograph.

The next morning when Esther entered the office Mr. Hargraves was sitting at his desk busily engaged with the morning's mail, but Mr. Blake was not there. A little later she learned that he had been called away on business for a few days.

Esther set about her duties at once, but all that day and the days that followed while Mr. Blake was away, a certain wonder was ever present in her mind. And when the junior partner, after being absent five days, returned to the office one afternoon just as Mr. Hargraves was going out, Esther told herself that something would surely happen. Well, something did happen.

Presently a young lady, who Esther decided at once was the most beautiful girl she had ever seen called and inquired for Mr. Blake. At the sound of the young lady's voice he sprang from his chair and was beside her in a moment. There was something in his manner as he greeted her and showed her into the private office that puzzled Esther not a little, and the way he took both her hands in his own when she departed did not tend to diminish the girl's perplexity.

"Miss Stanley!" Esther looked up, and Mr. Blake was standing beside her desk. His voice was vibrant with joy, and a great happiness shone in his face. "I've just got to tell you something!" he exclaimed in a burst of happy confidence. "She, the young lady who was just here, is my promised wife, and her name is Esther, the same as yours."

Surprise, compounded with a feeling which Esther could not define, held her under their power for an instant. Then she said quietly: "I hope you'll accept my congratulations, Mr. Blake."

"Thank you, Miss Stanley," he returned with a bright smile.

A few hours later Esther stood once more before the photograph on the mantel. "I'm glad he's happy," she murmured. "And I'm happy, too, because I've got you, dear old Dick," she added, as she bent forward and kissed the picture.

Birds' Power in Flight

What is the difference between a butterfly and a balloon? Not so much as we might think. Prof. G. H. Bryan of the University College of North Wales says they are about equal in efficiency. They both can make headway in the still air. If it were not for the wind we might have aerial regattas with boats suspended from balloons using wings instead of oars.

A pigeon descending shows the great work of the wings in resisting the downward and forward movement of the body, and this is difficult to imitate in a machine flight. Gulls are about the best aerial gymnasts known. They utilize the little eddies of wind thrown up by the crests and troughs of the waves, and know exactly where to go to get a lift from the wind.

All so-called sailing birds secure all the assistance they can from the air currents. They have to go to where the wind takes them to a certain extent and must rely upon the use of their wings if going in a particular direction. Birds possess much greater horse-power in proportion to their weight than man or animals.

Sainting the Cat in India.

At the government house in Poona, India, every cat which may happen to pass out of the front door after dark is sainted by the sentry who presents arms to pussy. Tradition relates that in 1838 Sir Robert Grant, governor of Bombay, died in the government house. On the evening of the day of his death a cat was seen to leave the house by the front door and to walk up and down a particular path where the late governor had been in the habit of strolling after sunset. A Hindoo sentry observed this, and told a priest, who declared that in the cat was Governor Grant's soul, and it should be saluted. As the particular cat could not be identified by the sentry it was decided to present arms to all the cats.

Peace-Destroying Swage Hammer.

It is a distressing fact that some of our most efficient labor-saving devices are peace-destroying and nerve-destroying because of the infernal racket they create. The pneumatic hammer, swaging machine, swaging hammer and most percussive tools are capable of much greater usefulness than they have yet attained, but, remarks the editor of Machinery, we cannot consistently wish them to come into general use until some means is invented to mitigate the noise.

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