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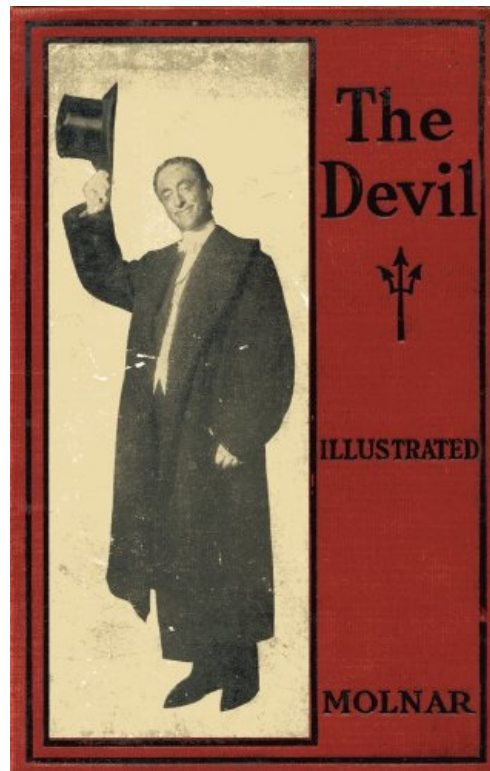
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DEVIL: A TRAGEDY OF THE HEART
AND CONSCIENCE ***



THE DEVIL

A TRAGEDY OF THE HEART AND CONSCIENCE

*Novelized by Joseph O'Brien from
Henry W. Savage's great play*

BY

FERENC MOLNAR

NEW YORK
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DR. MILLAR: "WHAT AN IDEAL COUPLE YOU TWO WOULD MAKE."—
Page 56.

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FOREWORD

There is a great lesson for all women and men in this wonderful story. It is one that will impress with its power. But I am glad to say that I do not believe fully in its truth. The Devil here wins his victory, as he has won many. But each year, as men and women get better, the victories of Satan are fewer. Good men and good women fight against evil and do not yield.

This tragic, heart-breaking story, by the wonderful new writer, tells one side of the battle between good and evil that goes on in every human heart. It has its lesson for all men and women.

It is a powerful warning against playing with fire. Its lesson, taught in the downfall of the man and woman, is "Keep away from evil, and the appearance of evil."

BEATRICE FAIRFAX.

THE CHARACTERS

Karl Mahler	An Artist
Heinrich	His Valet
Mimi	His Model
Herman Hofmann	A Banker
Olga Hofmann	The Banker's Wife
The Devil	Calling Himself Dr. Millar
Elsa Berg	An Heiress

The scenes are laid in Vienna, Austria, in Karl Mahler's studio, and in the conservatory reception-room at the Hofmanns', and all the events transpire within the space of one day.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

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NOTE:—The illustrations used in this book are reproduced from scenes in Henry W. Savage's production of "The Devil," the only version approved by the author.

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THE DEVIL

CHAPTER I

Herman Hofmann, the wealthy banker, and his beautiful young wife, Olga, had as their guest at dinner Karl Mahler, an artist. Some years earlier, before Hofmann married, Mahler, befriended by his family, had been sent away to Paris to study art. Olga, at that time a dependent ward in the Hofmann family, and the poor young art student loved each other with the sweet, pure affection of boy and girl.

In the absence of Karl, Olga yielded to the pressing suit of Herman and the importunities of her own relatives, all poor, and became his wife. Karl returned to find the sweetheart whom he had kissed for the first time when he told her good-by, married to another. He was not greatly shocked at the discovery, the life of an art student in Paris having somewhat dimmed the memory of his boyhood's love, and neither he nor Olga alluded to their early romance.

For six years the two had been friends, although they never saw each other alone. Karl was a frequent visitor at their house and Herman was his devoted and loyal friend. Olga honestly believed that she loved her husband and had long ago forgotten her love for Karl. Lately she had interested herself in his future to the extent of proposing for him a bride, Elsa Berg, a beautiful and youthful heiress, and she had arranged a grand ball, to be given so that the two young people might be brought together.

In all the six years of her married life Olga had never visited Karl's studio. Karl had never even offered to paint her portrait. Although neither would confess it, some secret prompting made them fear to break down the barriers of convention, and they remained to each other chaperoned and safe. On this evening, however, when Karl was with them, the subject of a portrait of Olga came up for the first time, and Herman declared that it must be painted.

"She is more beautiful than any of your models or your patrons," he said to Karl.

Olga was strangely disturbed, she could not tell why. She blushed and looked at Karl, whom the proposition seemed to excite to strange eagerness. She did not trust herself to speak, but listened to the artist and her husband.

Neither Olga nor Karl could have defined the strange, conflicting emotions with which they separately received Herman's proposition. Unwillingly Olga's mind traveled swiftly back to the old days and her girlhood, and she recalled the day of Karl's departure, the day he took her in his arms and kissed her lips and said:

"I love you, Olga; I will not forget."

The memory thrilled her and the color flamed into her cheeks. Karl looked at her, so enraptured and absorbed that he could scarcely give attention to Herman, who rattled on about the portrait. It was finally settled that the first sitting should be the following day at Karl's studio, where Olga would be left with him alone.

It was there that Olga was then to encounter the materialization of the impulses she had been, only half unconsciously, struggling against for six years; the spirit of evil purpose against which good contends; the incarnation of the arch fiend in the attractive shape of a suave, polished, plausible, eloquent man of the world, whose cynicism bridged the years of married life; whose subtle suggestions colored afresh the faded dreams which she believed faintly remembered, and believed would come no more.

Karl left them with the promise of a sitting on the morrow.

Karl's fitful slumber was disturbed that night by vague half dreams which oppressed him when he awoke. He was filled with misgiving, doubt, uncertainty. His thoughts, half formed, disturbing, were of Olga.

He tried to think of marriage with Elsa, but it was without enthusiasm. Warm, beautiful, affectionate, she made no impression on his heart, which seemed like ice.

He looked around the studio with aversion.

The pictures on the walls seemed no longer to represent the aspiration of the artist; they were mementos of the models who had posed and flirted and talked scandal within his walls.

He paced the floor restlessly, nervously, twisting his unlighted cigarette in his fingers until it crumbled, his mouth tight, his eyebrows drawn together. Then he seized his hat and overcoat and flung himself out of the door into the gathering winter storm.

For an hour he plunged through the snow, the chaos of the storm matching his mood. Almost exhausted, he turned back toward his home and entered. The room glowed warmly. In front of the inviting fire was the big arm-chair with its wide seat, comfortable cushions and high pulpit back. As he laid aside his greatcoat he stepped toward the chair, intending to bury himself in its depths and surrender to his mood. A shudder ran over him and he drew back, staring at the seat.

It was empty, his eyes assured him, but he could not rid himself of a feeling that it was occupied. He pressed his hands to his eyes and then flung them outward with the gesture of one distraught.

"I am going mad!" he thought.

He called loudly, harshly:

"Heinrich! Heinrich!"

His old servant, alarmed at the unwonted violence of his master's voice, hastened into the room. Karl flung aside his coat and Heinrich held for him his velvet dressing jacket. He slipped into it, shook himself, and lighted a cigarette. His hands shook with nervousness, and he held them out from him that he might look at them.

"Oh, what a terrible sight!" he groaned.

"Monsieur?" Heinrich said inquiringly.

"Has any one been here?" Karl asked.

"No, Monsieur, only Ma'm'selle Mimi. She is waiting in the studio to pose."

With an impatient gesture Karl walked across the room, picked up a newspaper, flung himself on a couch and held the sheet before his eyes. He did not even see the print, but he persisted, trying to banish his restless thoughts.

Heinrich, solicitously brushing and folding Karl's coat, waited. The artist looked at him impatiently:

"Tell Ma'm'selle Mimi I shall not need her to-day. She may go."

"Yes, Monsieur," Heinrich said.

The servant stepped to the door of the studio and threw it open. He called out:

"Ma'm'selle, Monsieur Karl says he will not need you to-day; you may go home."

Heinrich withdrew. Karl lay at full length on the couch, holding the paper before him.

A young woman, daintily featured, with rounded figure whose lines showed through her close-fitting costume, burst into the room.

Although conscious of her presence and irritated, Karl did not look. He pretended to be absorbed in his newspaper. Mimi looked at him and waited, but as he did not speak, she ventured timidly:

"Aren't you going to paint me to-day?"

"Er—no, not to-day."

"Do you not love me any more, Karl?"

The newspaper rattled with the artist's impatience and irritation, but he did not answer. Mimi approached him.

"You do not love me; you have ceased to care for me. Ah, Karl, when you loved me you painted me every day. Now you paint nothing but landscapes."



MIMI: "YOU DO NOT LOVE ME; YOU HAVE CEASED TO CARE FOR ME."—Page 16.

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[Link to larger image](#)

Karl forced a laugh.

"Nonsense!" he said. "You talk like a silly child, Mimi."

"You say that now, but you did not say such things when you loved me, Karl. It is always the way with us poor models. At first it is, 'Ah, what shoulders, what beautiful coloring, what perfect ankles!' Then you paint us every day.

"And then it is, 'What in the world have you done with your figure? It is all angles!' or, 'What on earth have you put on your face? It is as yellow as old parchment.' And then you paint landscapes."

Mimi burst into tears, and vigorously dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief. She was an extremely pretty girl of the bourgeois type, with heavy coils of straw-colored hair piled high on her head, and big blue eyes that were quick to weep.

Karl arose, threw aside his paper and essayed to comfort her.

"There, there," he said, patting her shoulder, "don't cry, Mimi; you are full of folly to-day."

As quick to smile as she had been to cry, Mimi unveiled her eyes and looked at him eagerly, her lips parting over her white teeth.

"Then you do love me, Karl? Ah, tell me that you love me."

"Yes."

"And you will paint me again? If not to-day, perhaps to-morrow?"

"Perhaps, but I am very busy."

He turned from her and sat on the couch again. Mimi's mood suddenly turned to anger, and she cried out at him furiously:

"I know that you do not love me, and I know why. You are going to be married.

"Yes, yes," as Karl made an impatient gesture; "I know it is true."

"You are very silly, Mimi," he said.

"Ah, no; I am not. It is true what I have said. I have heard all about it, but I did not believe it, because I was a fool. You are going to marry Ma'm'selle Elsa Berg, who is said to be very beautiful and who will be a great heiress; and then you will forget me, as you would be glad to do now."

"Where in the devil have you heard all of this?" Karl demanded, springing angrily to his feet.

"It does not matter; you cannot deny that it is true."

Then her mood changed swiftly to contrition, and she went close to Karl.

"But forgive me; I know it must be. I have always known, and I must have annoyed you. We models are always annoying—in our street clothes. Forgive me, Karl."

She looked appealingly at Karl, and he was moved.

"Never mind, Mimi; run along home, now, and I promise to paint you again, perhaps to-morrow, perhaps the next day."

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. Then she fled from the room. Karl flung himself down on the couch again and hid his face with his arms.

CHAPTER II

Olga's dream journey had been through the flowering orchard of girlhood, hand in hand with Karl, and she awoke with a sense of regret that the realities of everyday life should take the place of such joyous visions. She felt strangely elated during the day, and eagerly waited for the hour when Herman was to call for her and take her to Karl's studio.

"I wonder what it will be like there?" she asked herself a dozen times. "I think I have always been jealous of that studio and its possibilities, and I have always wanted to go there—but I did not dare."

Then she chided herself for the thought she had not uttered.

"Why, I am a goose! What am I confessing here to myself? That I am in love with Karl? What silly nonsense. Come, Olga, you are getting romantic."

Herman came after luncheon and they drove together to the studio building. Old Heinrich admitted them, his eyes growing big and round at the imposing splendor of Herman's greatcoat and the bewildering beauty of the grand lady.

Karl, in his artist's velvet jacket, hurried forward to greet them.

"Welcome to my workshop," he cried.

"How do you do?" Olga said, barely giving him her hand, and turning at once to let her eyes rove curiously around the walls of the room.

"How do you do, Karl?" Herman said. "You see, we are prompt. And now I am curious to see your place."

Karl watched Olga as she surveyed the room. He felt piqued at her seeming lack of interest in him.

"So this is your wonderful studio," she said absently.

"It is much like a junkshop," Karl said deprecatingly.

"It is very interesting," Olga said. "Whose picture is that?" she asked, pointing to a painting of a half nude figure on the wall.

"That? Oh, that is a model who has posed for me."

"Oh, yes, I recognize it. We met the girl on the stairs, Herman."

"Oh, yes; that is she."

Herman busied himself looking at the pictures, chuckling over those that caught his unpoetic fancy, and nudging Karl in the ribs at some of them.

"I must come again and inspect them more at my leisure," he said. "This afternoon I have to go away."

"I am sorry you are not to remain," Karl said politely.

"Oh, I suppose we might put off the sitting in view of the fact that the picture might have been painted any time these last six years," Herman said. "But Olga has been nervous about the ball we are going to have to-night, and I thought it best to bring her to-day to distract her. You know this is really a house-warming to-night."

"And we were obliged to invite so many people," Olga said, still looking at the pictures.

"I hate these social affairs," Herman rattled on, "but I suppose in our position they are inevitable. What time shall I return for Olga?"

"It grows dark quickly," Karl said, looking at his watch. "In another hour we shall not be able to see. Suppose you return about 4 o'clock."

"Very well; and now I must be going. You are coming to the ball to-night, Karl? You know you really are the guest of honor; isn't he, Olga?"

"Yes, indeed. Karl is to fall in love with his future wife to-night."

Karl looked at her, but she spoke with perfect self-possession, and lightly.

"I shall do my best," he said, and he tried to speak with enthusiasm.

"Ah, you are not half grateful enough for this treasure, Karl; you should be happy," Olga said.

"Of course he should, and he will," Herman interposed, moving toward the door. "We will all be happy—you and Elsa and Karl and I—everybody, I hope."

Olga went nearer to Karl and spoke seriously.

"She is a very charming girl, Karl."

"If you say one word more about that girl I shall fall in love with her immediately, which would be ahead of my matrimonial scheme," Karl replied jestingly. "You know I am not obliged to fall in love until to-night."

"Well, well, I must be off," Herman said, as he went up to kiss Olga. "Good-by, dear; I shall call for you at 4 o'clock."

Almost against his will, Karl asked a question which he had never before in all his life thought of.

"Aren't you afraid to leave your wife alone?"

"Alone?"

"With me, I mean?"

Herman looked at him, and then spoke jestingly, but with an effort. "I am hurrying away because I am afraid I shall change my mind and take Olga with me," he said.

"You are not jealous?" Olga asked.

"If you don't want the truth—no, I am not," Herman replied, and in his tone there was the peculiar meaning which his words did not convey. "If I were not afraid of becoming ridiculous, I should say warningly, 'Children, be sure to be good.'"

He paused and looked at both of them. Then he said:

"Good-by."

As he turned, Karl followed and escorted him through the door. Olga stood frowning, worried, ill at ease. Karl looked at her in surprise when he returned.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

Olga started nervously and looked at him. She pressed her hands before her eyes and for a moment did not speak. She looked away as Karl approached her and said tenderly:

"Are you afraid? Please tell me."

"I don't know what is the matter with me, but just now, when my husband went away, I felt as if I had been left without a protector."

She broke off abruptly, and Karl urged her to explain.

"What do you mean? I don't understand," he said.

"Yes, you do, Karl," Olga said, as she turned and faced him. "You know. I have fought against coming here for six years; ever since my marriage."

She looked away from him, around the studio, with its bizarre decorations, and shuddered.

"Ugh! this place looks like a devil's kitchen," she cried. "These strange things, terrible monsters, cold, white statues, heads without bodies, and you in their midst like a conjurer. I did not notice them while Herman was here, but now——"

Karl turned swiftly toward her.

"But now?" he asked.

Olga looked at him with an expression of terror in her eyes. The two stood thus at bay.

Left to themselves in the big studio, facing each other, Karl and Olga were silent. There was a look in Karl's eyes that Olga had never seen before; there was a tumult in her heart that she had never before felt. It was Karl who first recovered himself and broke the silence, trying to speak lightly:

"Don't be nervous," he said, reassuringly. "This is the reception-room of my studio. Every woman I paint comes here."

"And do you paint every woman who comes here?" Olga asked slowly.

"No," Karl replied shortly.

There was another awkward pause. Olga could not tell why she had asked that question any more than Karl could have told why he had asked Herman if he was not afraid to leave them alone. It was some unsuspected jealousy that prompted it.

"Did you understand my husband?" Olga asked.

"Yes, I think I did."

"He said, 'I trust you.' Why should he say that? Why should it not be a matter of course?"

"You don't think he is really jealous?"

Olga shook her head.

"I don't know," she said. "During the six years we have been together and you have been our friend, he has often pretended to be jealous. This time there was something in his voice that made me believe it was more than pretense. It is the first time he has ever left us alone."

They were standing, Karl near the door, where he had bidden Herman farewell, and Olga across the apartment. In an alcove in one corner an open fire burned brightly, casting a red glow over the big, comfortable arm-chair drawn up before it, with its high, pulpit-shaped back toward them. Karl walked over to Olga and said with quiet earnestness:

"We have tried to avoid it, Olga; tried for six years. Now that the situation is forced upon us, why not be honest? Let us talk about it frankly."

"I think it was sweet not to discuss it for six long years," Olga said, smiling at him. "A clean conscience is like a warm cloak, Karl; it enfolds us and makes us feel so comfortable."

She tried to make her mood seem light, but Karl would not fall in with it.

"Last night, when it was suggested that I should paint your portrait, you gave me a look I had never seen before," he persisted. "I wonder why?"

"I don't know," Olga answered, her fear returning. "Don't let us talk about it; I don't want to."

"You must not be afraid of me, Olga; if I were not I you might be frightened. I am fond of you, yes; but respectfully. I do not see what harm can be done by talking everything over quietly. It seems so long ago—seven years—since they told me that Herman was to be your husband. It was on the anniversary of the day——"

"Oh, Karl!" she protested, holding out her hands to silence him.

"The day we kissed each other," he went on, speaking so quietly that it seemed almost a whisper. "We were almost children then. I was a poor little chap, who gave drawing lessons to Herman and his sisters. You were a little waif, fed cake and tea at the millionaire's table. There we met, a beggar boy and a beggar girl, thrown together in a palace. We looked at each other, and I think we understood."

Olga covered her burning face with her hands, and Karl went on:

"We kissed each other, quite innocently; just one kiss, the memory of which has almost faded."

"Yes, Karl, faded," Olga cried eagerly. "We have grown up sensibly and we never mentioned it."

Karl seemed not to hear her interruption. He went on:

"You became Herman's wife and went to live in a palace. I found you there when I came back from Paris, still fond of you, but determined never to tell you so, and when I met you again I, too, was somewhat changed. Still, when our eyes met, Olga, it was with the same look of the two poor, longing little beggars of the years ago. But we did not kiss again."

"Why not?" Olga breathed.

"Your husband and I are the best of friends," Karl said. "Though we have met hundreds of times, you and I, we have not mentioned it."

Olga turned to him gratefully and held out her hand to clasp his.

"You are a good, true friend, Karl."

"Are you satisfied now?" Karl asked her, smiling. "You are not afraid of me, are you?"

"No; but there was something in my husband's voice that frightened me," Olga answered. "He knows what we were to each other, and when he was leaving us here alone I think it made him feel uncomfortable. We aren't in love any more, are we, Karl?"

"No, of course not."

"And it is sweet to think that we have not entirely forgotten old times, isn't it?"

"Yes," he answered absently.

"And, of course, if we loved each other still you would not marry, would you, Karl?"

"Of course not," he said shortly.

"Now you will get married and you will be very, very happy. And I, too, shall be happy, because I want you to marry, and I myself have chosen a sweet, clever girl for you."

"Exactly," Karl acquiesced dryly.

"And now let us think no more of it," Olga cried, her mood changing to one of gaiety.

She ran over to the door, turned and faced Karl, knocking loudly on the panel.

"Now for work; we have done nothing," she said. "Monsieur, I have come to have my portrait painted."

"Come in, madame," Karl said, bowing gravely and entering into her play. "Good-morning."

"I have come to have my portrait painted," Olga said again.

Karl forgot the playing and exclaimed seriously:

"Ah, last night I made a memory sketch of you after I got home. I have made many, very many, but now I see you differently."

"Why?" Olga asked, startled again by his vehemence.

"Yesterday I saw the lines of your figure; to-day I see your soul," he said. "Yesterday you were a model; to-day you are an inspiration."

"Please, Karl; please, don't; we agreed to end everything," she pleaded.

"It is hard to end everything so suddenly."

"Karl, my good friend, I did wrong in coming here," Olga said. "Now that I did come, let us work. Take your colors and brush. We must get through with it as soon as possible."

"You are right, Olga; as soon as possible."

"What shall I do first?" she asked.

"Take off your hat and coat, please."

Karl stepped toward her with outstretched hands as if to help her. She drew back, with a little gesture of apprehension.

"You mustn't touch me," she said.

As she brushed past him Karl caught a whiff of fragrance from her hair that was intoxicating.

"Do you use perfume on your hair?" he asked, quite innocently.

"Certainly not," she laughed.

"Oh, then, it is the natural perfume of your hair. Pardon me; I stood too close to you."

Olga removed her hat and cloak. She looked up and saw that Karl was regarding her intently.

"You seem to be studying my features," she said.

"I know them by heart, each one," he answered. "I am thinking of a pose. You know your husband wished a half length in evening gown."

"Yes; I should have preferred a full length in street costume."

"I agree with Herman. You must be quick; it is getting dark."

"What shall I do?"

"Your waist; you must take it off; you will find some shawls there from which to select one for your shoulders. I will go into the studio."

"Oh, Karl."

"Don't mind; I shall close the door. Oh, it is snowing terribly," he added as he moved toward the

big studio.

"Snowing! Oh, Karl, can't we postpone this? I don't feel well to-day; to-morrow I could come and bring my maid."

"Certainly not; your husband would surely want to know why we did no work to-day. Now I will leave you."

CHAPTER III

He left the room, closing the studio doors behind him. Olga looked apprehensively about her. Some mysterious presence seemed to oppress her. She fumbled with nerveless fingers at the buttons of her waist.

"Oh, what folly!" she cried to herself. "What is the matter with me?"

Resolutely she set to work and drew from her beautiful shoulders and gleaming, rounded arms the silken waist that covered them. She turned to get the shawl, and the waist fell to the floor, as she recoiled with a shriek of terror from an apparition that arose slowly from the depths of the big arm-chair.

Where there had been no human being an instant before Olga saw a tall, strange-looking man. He was in conventional afternoon attire, save that his waistcoat was red, in sharp contrast to the somber black of his frock coat. His hair was black. His upward pointing eyebrows were black, and his eyes shone like dull-burning lumps of coal. His face was like a mask, matching his immaculate linen in whiteness. It was cynical in its expression and almost sinister as he bowed low, with his hands folded over his breast, and said in a low, musical voice:

"Pardon me, madam, I think you dropped something."

He stooped and picked up the silken waist which had fallen from Olga's hands. As he held it out to her she drew back in horror.

Olga shrank from this strange being, sensible of his serpent-like fascination, even while he repelled her. It flashed across her consciousness that he was something more than human, something worse—the embodiment of malevolent purpose—a man devoid of good—the Devil himself.

He came from behind the chair, and as he moved toward her his every action heightened the impression she had received. In a situation where any man might have been confused he was perfectly self-possessed. His attitude was neither offensive nor ingratiating. He became at once a part of her surroundings, of her thoughts, yes, of her soul. It was this influence that she felt herself combating with growing weakness.

"I hope you will forgive me," his smooth, suave voice went on, breaking the stillness almost melodiously, and he bowed again. "I permitted myself to fall asleep."

Still Olga could not find tongue, and she drew yet farther away. The man, or the devil, watched her as she groped for the shawl, found it and quickly wound its filmy length around her beautiful shoulders and arms. An expression of cynical amusement crossed his face.

"Excuse me, but I awoke just as you were about to unbutton your blouse," he said. "Propriety should have made me close my eyes, but——"

"Oh!" Olga cried, shocked into speech.

"Oh, I know, madam," he said, with a bow, "you think I am suspicious, and you only came here ——"

"To have my portrait painted," Olga said quickly.

"Precisely," he acquiesced, with the same cynical expression. "Only yesterday I met a lady at the dentist's, and I observed that she permitted him to extract a perfectly good and very pretty tooth."

"But I——" Olga began, accepting the defensive position into which he placed her, when he interrupted her:

"Yes, you, I know, speak the truth. I am even at liberty to believe you, but I cannot."

For an instant Olga recovered her self-possession, and her indignation sprang into a flame that she should be addressed in this manner by a man whom she had never seen before—an intruder.

"I don't know why I permit a stranger to talk to me in this fashion," she exclaimed. "It amazes me."

The man stepped toward her. Terrified, she turned and fled toward the door of the studio.

"Karl! Karl!" she called.

The stranger smiled as the doors were flung open and Karl burst into the room. The young artist paused, astonished at the presence of the stranger. He was more amazed when the man cried out in the voice of genial comradeship:

"Hello, Karl; how do you do?"

"Why, how do you do?" Karl faltered, looking blankly from Olga to the mysterious visitor. "I don't ___"

"You don't remember me," the other said. "Don't you recall me at Monte Carlo?"

"Oh, yes, at Monte Carlo," Karl said with dawning recollection.

"It was an eventful day," the stranger said.

"Yes, yes, of course, I remember; it was last fall, when I had lost all my money playing roulette. Some one stood behind me, and it was you. I was afraid when I turned and saw you, because I fancied I had seen you a moment before, beside the croupier, grinning at me as my gold pieces were swept away. But when I had lost everything you offered me a handful of gold."

"Which you refused, but I saw the longing to accept in your eyes."

"I did not know you."

"But I offered it again and you accepted."

"Yes, and in ten minutes I had recouped my losses and won \$20,000 besides," Karl cried with growing enthusiasm. "I remember indeed. Your money seemed to possess mystic luck. When you put it in my hands it glowed, and I thought it was hot. It seemed to burn me."

"You were excited, my boy," said the other genially. "But you repaid me and invited me to dine. I could not accept, because I was forced to leave for Spain that same evening. I promised, however, to call on you when you needed me—and here I am."

He bowed to Karl and Olga, who stood in speechless astonishment at this strange dialogue. She could understand nothing of this uncanny stranger; this specter in black and white, who seemed to emit a lurid radiance as if his red waistcoat were alive.

"It was kind of you to come," Karl said. "I am glad."

"You were not here when I entered," the visitor said, "and I took a seat in that comfortable arm-chair. The warmth of the fire affected me, and I permitted myself to fall asleep."

He indicated, with a sweeping gesture, the big pulpit-backed arm-chair. Olga started and cried out:

"That chair was empty; I remember quite well, when my husband was here. There was no one in it, I am absolutely certain."

Karl was so strangely affected by the stranger's presence that he did not notice Olga's agitation. The other regarded her with his expression of cynical amusement, bowed gravely and said:

"Then I was mistaken, madam."

"Won't you sit down?" Karl said. "Allow me to present you to—but I can't remember your name."

"It does not matter," the other said with an expansive outward gesture of his restless, eloquent hands. "I am a philanthropist, traveling incognito. You may call me anything you like; call me Dr. Millar."

"Dr. Millar," Karl repeated, seeming for the first time to have some doubt as to the character of his guest.

"Oh, you may rest assured my social position is beyond question," the stranger said, as if divining his thought.



Karl did not heed the irony of his speech, but presented him to Olga, who distantly acknowledged his bow. As Karl appeared to succumb to this strange influence, she felt herself growing indignant. Millar seemed bent on provoking an outburst, and his astonishing remarks in another would have seemed vulgar insolence, but in him they possessed a singular meaning that made both Karl and Olga shiver.

"Under different circumstances I should now take my hat and say good-by," Millar said, after the introduction. "But my infinite tact compels me to force my presence upon you in this most unpleasant situation."

The innuendo stung Olga, and she turned to the artist.

"Karl, I can hardly believe it," she exclaimed, indignantly. "Think of it—this man dared to——"

"How long has your husband been dead?" Millar interrupted with exasperating coolness.

"I am not a widow," Olga said, surprised that she should reply.

"Oh, you are divorced?"

"I am not."

"Then if you feel that I have offended you I should think your husband would be the proper man to appeal to," he said with the utmost coolness.

He seemed like a trainer, prodding tame animals with sharp prongs out of the lethargy of their caged lives to stir them to viciousness. Turning to Karl he went on:

"However, if you wish it, I am also at your disposal. But do you not see, madam, that it would be an admission on your part?"

He spoke as one who had dared read every secret thought of each. Bewildered, Karl cried out:

"What does all this talk mean? I don't understand anything. You come in here unannounced; I don't know how nor from where. You make us feel quite uncomfortable, just as if you had trapped us in some compromising situation."

"Yes, yes, that is it," Olga cried, relieved at Karl's outburst.

The stranger looked at them amusedly.

"You may be as impolite to me as you wish; I cannot go," he said.

"Why?" Olga demanded.

"My departure now would mean that I leave you because I have interrupted you. On the other hand, by remaining I prove that I suspect nothing."

"There is nothing to suspect," Karl declared angrily. "I do not want you here."

"Then that is settled; let us talk of something else," the visitor remarked with the most casual inattention to Karl's rage. "The weather; isn't it snowing beautifully? Art; are you preparing anything for the spring exhibition at the Royal Academy?"

"Perhaps I may send something," Karl answered sullenly.

Olga's bewilderment gave place to panic. In her mind was formed the purpose of snatching up her waist and rushing from the room. Before she could do it the stranger was there, holding the waist out and bowing profoundly.

"Permit me, madam," he said.

With a cry of astonishment Olga snatched at the garment.

"Who are you? Where do you come from?" she cried.

With his restless, vibrant hands in the air, the stranger said:

"I come from nowhere, I go everywhere; I am here."

He touched his forehead with his long, white fingers, and his black eyes were fixed upon her. Clutching the silken garment she had worn, Olga rushed into the studio. Millar, man or devil, looked after her and chuckled.

CHAPTER IV

Karl threw himself moodily into a chair as Olga fled into the outer studio, and sat there, not

looking at his unwelcome visitor. Dr. Millar seemed to find his dejection amusing. He allowed the silence to remain undisturbed, while he puffed a cigarette. Then he said, half to himself, half to Karl:

"Full of temperament, that woman, and pretty, too; extremely pretty."

"Yes, she is pretty," Karl acquiesced, without looking at him.

"It's a pity she doesn't love her husband," was the next cynical remark that fell on Karl's ears.

He wheeled in his seat and looked at the visitor, who went on with perfect coolness:

"How do I know? It was apparent when she fancied I had insulted her and turned to you for protection."

Karl angrily slammed down an ash tray he had picked up in his nervous fingers and began to pace the floor. Millar went on in a light tone:

"She does not love her husband. He must be a genius or a very commonplace man. Marriage always is a failure with such men. Common men live so low that women are afraid some one may steal into their lives at night through a cellar window. Genius—well, genius lives on the top floor, up toward the clouds, and with so many gloomy steps to climb and no elevator, it's very uncomfortable for a pretty woman. Her ideal is one easy flight of stairs to comfortable living rooms on the first floor."

Karl maintained silence, and continued to walk the floor. He looked at his watch and started toward the door of the reception-room leading into the hall, which was locked.

"This is the second time I have seen madam's shoulders," Millar remarked, casually, blowing cigarette rings in the air.

"What do you mean?" Karl demanded, stung to speech by jealousy.

"Ah, I saw them first in Paris, at the Louvre, fashioned of snow-white marble. They were the shoulders of Venus. Am I right, Karl?"

"I don't know," the artist snapped.

"Well, you must take my word for it, then," Millar said lightly. "I have seen both. And since Alcamenes I have known but one sculptor who could form such wonderful shoulders."

"Who?" Karl asked, turning to him.

"Prosperity," Millar replied, sententiously. "Such tender, soft, exquisite curves are possible only to women who live perfectly. Madam must be the wife of a millionaire."

Karl fell to pacing the floor again, glancing impatiently at the door through which Olga had fled.

"Is she dressing?" asked Millar slyly.

"Yes," Karl answered nervously.

"Is there a mirror in your studio?"

"Yes."

"Madam must be very respectable," Millar said in an insinuating tone; "she takes so long to dress."

"Your remarks are in very bad taste," Karl cried angrily, walking up threateningly to his visitor.

Millar stood erect, without changing his expression of ironical amusement, and said:

"Do you wish to offend me?"

"Yes," Karl snarled.

"Then you, too, must be respectable," the visitor said coolly, adding, as Karl looked at him with wonder: "In a situation like this only a very respectable man could behave with such infernal stupidity."

Karl was about to retort when the studio door opened and Olga entered. He turned quickly toward her and she went to him without noticing Millar.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Your husband will be here in ten minutes," Millar interposed.

Olga turned toward him and cried accusingly:

"Then you were not asleep in that chair when my husband was here. You heard him say when he would return."

"Madam is mistaken. Feminine presentiment always feels the approach of the husband ten minutes ahead of time. Were it not for those ten minutes there would be more divorced women, but fewer locked doors."

As he spoke he walked over and unlocked the door leading into the hall, then turned and looked at them calmly.

"Is this never to finish?" Olga asked.

"I tried to change the subject, but Karl would not let me," Millar answered.

"I have not spoken a word," Karl protested.

"By your actions, Karl; by the way you jumped up, impatiently consulted your watch, rushed to the door. Poor chap, he was afraid," he added to Olga.

"Afraid!" Karl exclaimed.

"Yes, afraid that your husband would come before you finished dressing. And you were right, Karl."

"Why, my dear Olga——" Karl began impatiently, when the other interrupted him.

"Please, please, let us be logical," he urged. "Look at the situation. The husband enters suddenly. 'Well, here I am, back again, my darling,' he announces. 'Where is the picture? I must see the picture.' There is none. Karl did not work on the picture. Your husband is worried; he does not speak, but he is irritated. He wants to speak and the words stick in his throat. You look at each other, unhappy. Nothing has happened, but the mischief is done. What mischief? Appearances. Whatever you say makes matters worse, and a compromising situation like this is never forgotten by the husband. You go home together in silence."

"Ah, if it were like that," Karl broke in; "but we are not alone. You are here."

Millar shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, that is it; I am here, and with one word I could dispel the illusion," he acquiesced. "But I know myself; I am cursed with a peculiar, sinister sense of humor, and I am afraid I would not say the word. Hence, when the husband enters we are all silent. Then I say, 'I regret to have arrived at such an inopportune moment.' I take my hat and walk out, leaving you, madam, your husband and Karl."

He seemed to find keen pleasure in the possibility of forcing the two into a position which would cause them suffering and weaken the barriers of self-control they had built up around that boy and girl love that had come back so vividly to both. Had they regarded him as merely human it is certain that Karl would have kicked this cynical being out of the studio, with his infernal innuendoes. But there was something supernatural about him. He dominated both the artist and the wife, and they were completely under his spell, struggle as they would to break it. Olga shrank from the cruelty of their tormentor.

"If this is a jest it is a cruel one," she cried.

"True, madam. But there is another way. If you wish it I can be quite truthful. Should your husband arrive I can tell him the portrait has not been touched and ask his pardon."

"Pardon for what?"

"For having seen your shoulders."

"This is a trap," Olga cried, turning toward Karl for protection. "What do you want? You overwhelm me with false insinuations. I hardly know you five minutes, and I imagine I feel your long fingers at my throat."

"Other pretty women do not feel them quite so soon," he murmured, bending toward her.

Enraged at the attitude of the man, Karl stepped toward him.

"Stop! I won't allow any more of this," he commanded.

The entrance of Heinrich checked his speech. The old servant said:

"The tailor has sent some evening clothes, Monsieur Karl, but they are not yours."

"They are mine," interrupted the stranger.

"Yours?" Karl said in amazement.

"Yes; they were crushed in my trunk," the other said coolly. "I told the tailor to press them and send them here for the evening. I must dress, as I am invited to the ball of one of the most beautiful women in the city to-night at the residence of the Duke of Maranese."

"But the Duke is not living there any more," Olga interposed. "He is in Madrid."

"Yes, I know that; I met the Duke in Paris."

"He has sold his house to us. We are living there now, and the ball is given by me," she went on.

The man looked at her, his black eyes seeming to burn through her own. Shrinking, fearful, fascinated, Olga was held in the spell of those eyes.

"Was I mistaken? Am I not invited?" he asked.

"Yes, you are invited," she faltered.

She could not resist the subtle influence of the man, even while every instinct of good made her recoil from him. With a triumphant smile he bowed and said softly:

"Madam, a little while ago you asked me what I wanted. It was your invitation that I wanted. I thank you."

"But my husband," Olga said, already repenting of the advantage she had given him.

"Oh, he will be delighted to see me," the stranger assured her confidently. "He speculates in wheat; I have information that will be of value to him. The crop has turned out worse than was expected. You love your husband; you should be happy that the wheat crop is bad."

"I am," Olga assented. "We want wheat to be bad because the price will go up."

"Your husband will make another fortune, and you will have the new gown you want."

"How do you know I want a new gown?" Olga asked, falling in once more with the devil's humor of the man.

"I observe that you have a new hat, and a very pretty one; surely you want a new gown."

"You must be married."

"Married! not I," he exclaimed. "A wife is like a monocle; it looks well, but one sees more clearly without it."

"Your views seem against marriage; why?" Olga asked.

The tone of Millar became suddenly serious as he said:

"You want Karl to marry; I want to prevent him from marrying."

"Please let's not discuss that," Karl protested.

"Pardon me, Karl, but an artist should not marry," he went on. "Your future wife will swear to stand by your side for life—until the wedding day—and the day after she will be in your way."

"Not the true wife," Olga declared.

"Ah, but the true wife is always the other fellow's wife," he answered.

Millar had talked so absorbingly that Karl and Olga unconsciously drew near to each other. They stood in front of the high pulpit back of the arm-chair, each one resting a hand on the chair back. Although they were quite unaware of it, their position suggested that of a young couple, before the altar, about to be joined in wedlock. The cynical humor of the situation struck Millar, who walked around them, stood in the chair and leaned over the back, like a preacher in his pulpit.

"You are a pessimist," Olga declared, looking up at him.

"No, not a pessimist; only practical."

"I agree with you," Karl said. "A man should stay at home."

CHAPTER V

Millar leaned down, placing his hands over Karl's and Olga's as they rested on the back of the chair. Looking at Karl, he said:

"Why didn't you stay at home? You ran away to become an artist. You refused a professional position and ordinary morals; a decent occupation at so much a week. You wanted to go out and seek the Golden Fleece of Fame. Now, fight your battle; fight it alone; don't get married."

As he spoke he lifted the hands of Karl and Olga and placed them together, holding them clasped in his own. They thrilled at each other's touch; they looked into each other's eyes, and they hardly heard the cynical devil's voice as Millar leaned yet farther toward them and said:

"I was thinking what a splendid couple you two would make."

Olga felt herself yielding to the devilish insinuation of Millar. She made no effort to withdraw her hand from Karl's; she was completely under his sinister, dominating influence. Karl's will seemed equally impotent; he could not shake off the mysterious obsession. This man was more than a mere physical presence; he was a part of their very selves—the weaker, sensual impulses against which they had fought, but which now seemed gaining the mastery. The struggle went on in the soul of each as Millar's voice fell melodiously on their ears:

"The most important thing to you in life is to find your proper mate. Generations of conventional treatment will try to prevent you from doing so, by pretending it is impossible. But down in your hearts, in their depths where truth is not perverted by the veneer of convention, I know and you know that it is the simplest thing on earth. Here you are full of talent and longing; here is a

woman, beautiful, passionate——"

Karl made a last struggle against the inevitable consequence of this demon's urging, drawing Olga away from him.

"I beg of you, don't!" he cried. "When I look at you I fear. Please don't speak of it. For six years we have lived peacefully."

"Say what you will," the soft, even voice persisted, "I can read your eyes and they are telling me. Don't believe him; he lies," he went on to Olga. "He dreams of her—you—every night and you of him, and he knows it and you know it. Ah, I understand the language of your eyes. No matter what you say, that little love light in your eyes discredits you, reveals your inmost thoughts, and I read them through."

"Let me speak," Karl pleaded. "For six years we have lived quietly in peace, good friends, nothing else. Olga has not the least interest in me, and I—I am quite, quite indifferent."

"Any one who thinks Karl capable of a base thought must be base and contemptible himself," Olga cried.

The two were almost hysterical as they stood beside each other, warding off the evil that seemed to emanate from the mysterious person who towered over them from the pulpit-backed chair. Karl held Olga's right hand in his; his left hand was on her shoulder protectingly. Millar spoke quickly, leaning far down toward them:

"It is not a base thought; it is a beautiful thought, a thought shedding happiness, warmth and joy upon your otherwise miserable lives. But happiness, warmth and joy have a price that must be paid. He who loves wine too well will go to a drunkard's grave, but while he is drunk with wine angels sing to him.

"Whatever the price, his happiness is cheaply bought. The poet sings his greatest song when he is about to die, and is a poor, weak, human mortal to live without wine and song and women's lips? A little stump of a candle shines its brightest ere it goes out forever. It should teach you that one glow of warmth is worth all this life can give. Life has no object but to be thrown away. It must end; let us end it well. Let our raging passions set fire to everything about us, burning, burning, burning until we ourselves are reduced to ashes. Those who pretend otherwise are hypocrites and liars."

The two listened spellbound to this amazing sermon of sin. Karl's arm slipped down to Olga's waist. He felt himself drawing her closer to him.

"Don't be a liar," Millar urged, his eyes still burning into them; "don't be a hypocrite. Be a rascal, but be a pleasant rascal and the world is yours. Look at me; all the world is mine, and what I have told you is the honest confession of all the world. We are baptized, not with water, but with fire. Love yourself; only yourself; wear the softest garments, sip the sweetest wine, kiss the prettiest lips."

No subtler tempter ever spoke to the hearts of a man and a woman. Karl was leaning over Olga now; he saw her eyes, her lips, soft, warm, rose-colored, he felt her arms as she clung to him, while over them both gloated the sinister figure of Millar—the devil—triumphant, confident that his work was done.

There was a crashing ring at the doorbell that acted like an electric shock on the group. Karl and Olga came to their senses, dazed, trembling, thankful. Millar stepped down from the chair, baffled, and turned his back upon them.

"My husband!" Olga gasped.

"Mr. Moneybags!" Millar sneered contemptuously.

Olga and Karl quickly drew apart. Both were relieved. Olga felt as if she had stepped back from the brink of a terrible precipice, over which she had almost fallen. Her face was colorless, and there were lines of agony across her brow. The two unhappy people stood staring at each other for a full minute before Heinrich entered and announced Herman.

It had been growing dark in the studio during the remarkable discourse by Millar, but so absorbed had both his listeners been in their own tremendous emotions that they had paid no heed. Now, as Herman entered, his first exclamation was:

"How dark it is in here. I am sorry I am late."

Heinrich turned on the lights, and the apartment was suddenly illuminated. Karl and Olga had not yet recovered their self-possession, but Karl managed to indicate with a wave of his hand his strange visitor.

"Dr. Millar," he said.

Millar nodded absently and barely replied to Herman's cordial greeting. He was still enraged at the interruption which had prevented the success of his infamous plan. Herman turned quickly to Karl and Olga.

"Well, children, where is the picture? I am anxious to see it," he exclaimed.

"There is no picture," was all Karl could say. Olga, filled with apprehension at she knew not what, was silent.

"No picture!" Herman exclaimed. "What have you been doing all this time?"

"It has been dark for an hour," Karl explained.

"Yes, but Olga has been here for two hours," Herman said, looking at his watch.

There was an instant of silence that threatened to become painfully embarrassing. Olga was about to speak when Millar unexpectedly stepped forward, briskly and politely.

"My dear Monsieur Hofmann, it was my fault," he explained. "I came a moment after you left. I had not seen Karl in two years. We chatted and the time flew past. It was an extremely interesting conversation and madam was so kind as to invite me to the ball this evening."

"You will accept, I trust," Herman said with ready hospitality.

"Yes, thank you," Millar said. "I have come direct from Odessa, where I have had a talk with the Russian wheat magnate."

"Ah, I know; I shall lose money; the wheat crop is bad," Herman said impatiently.

"Oh, isn't that good for us?" Olga asked.

"No, dear, it is not; I am short on wheat."

"What does short on wheat mean?" Olga asked.

"It means digging a pit for others and falling into it yourself," Millar remarked cynically.

"However," he went on, "things are not so bad. I have reliable information that the later crop will be abundant."

"Good; I am delighted to learn this," Herman said, very much pleased with Millar, who now spoke pleasantly and ingratiatingly.

Karl had paid little attention to the colloquy between Herman and Millar. He tried to speak to Olga, but could not catch her eye. She seemed to wish to avoid him. She watched her opportunity, however, and managed to whisper to Millar:

"I want to speak with you alone."

Millar brought his subtlety into instant play. Turning to Herman he asked:

"By the way, have you seen the sketch of madam Karl made yesterday? It is atrociously bad."

"No; where is it? I would like to see it," Herman cried eagerly.

"It is in the studio," Millar said.

"You must show it to me, Karl," Herman said, walking toward the studio door with the young artist. "I am sorry you didn't start on the picture to-day, but I suppose it can't be helped. What in the world were you talking about all that time?"

As they went out talking, Olga followed slowly. As she passed Millar he said:

"I will await you here."

Olga went with Karl and her husband. She had hardly left the room when the door from the hall opened and Mimi entered. As Millar turned toward her with his ironical bow she drew back, affrighted.

"Oh, excuse me," she murmured.

"You wish to see the artist?" Millar said.

"Yes, please."

He walked over, took her by the shoulders and coolly pushed her through the door into the hall.

"Wait there, my dear," he said. "He is engaged just now."

Then he turned to meet Olga, who entered suddenly, looking suspiciously around the room.

"I thought I heard a woman's voice," she exclaimed.

"The scrubwoman; I sent her away," Millar explained.

"I wanted to speak with you alone," Olga began, turning toward him and speaking very earnestly, "in order to tell you——"

"That is not true," Millar interrupted her, cynically.

"What is not true?"

"What you wanted to tell me," he said with exasperating suavity. "You really want to talk with me because you regret that my sermon was interrupted by Mr. Moneybags."

"No, no, I simply want to tell you the truth," she protested.

"You may want to tell the truth—but you never do. I might believe you, if you told me you were not telling the truth."

"Must I think and speak as you wish?" she cried desperately.

"No, not yet. What may I do for you, madam?"

"Please do not come to-night," she implored.

Millar smiled deprecatingly. She went on rapidly, speaking in a low tone that she might not be overheard by Herman and Karl.

"I am myself again—a happy, dutiful wife. Your frivolous morals hurt me. Your words, your thoughts, your sinister influence that seems to force me against my will, frighten me. I must confess that I had become interested in your horrible sermon when, thank God, my good husband rang the bell and put an end to it. He came in at the proper moment."

"Yes, as an object-lesson," Millar sneered. "I observed you closely. We three were beginning to understand one another when he came in."

"Won't you drop the subject?" Olga asked.

"Are you afraid of it?"

"No," she answered coldly; "but please don't come to-night."

Millar bowed deeply, as if granting her request, but he replied coolly:

"I shall come."

"And if my husband asks you not to come?"

"He will ask me to come."

"And if I should ask you in the presence of my husband not to come?"

"I will agree to this, madam," Millar said, looking at her with amusement. "If you do not ask me, in the presence of your husband, to come to-night I will not come. Is that fair?"

"Yes, that is more than nice. It is the first really nice thing you have said," Olga said, greatly relieved.

She wanted to be rid of this terribly sinister influence; to be out of reach of the being who seemed to compel her thoughts to link her present with the past. She wished to feel again the sweet, wholesome purpose that had inspired her yesterday; to go ahead with her unselfish plans for Karl's future. Now that he had given his promise, she was eager to be away, and as Karl and Herman entered she suggested to her husband that it was time to go.

"Yes, put on your coat," Herman said, turning to talk to Millar, whom he found interesting. Karl helped Olga on with her coat, and the touch of it brought back the feeling that had surged over him when he had leaned down to kiss her a few minutes before.

"Now I see how unworthy is my sketch," he said softly.

"Do not look at me like that," Olga protested.

"Why not?" Karl asked hopelessly. "Even when I don't look at you I see you just the same."

Olga covered her face and turned away from him.

"Karl, you shall not do my portrait," she said. "Come, Herman, let us go home," she called to her husband.

Herman and Millar were deep in the discussion of a subject on which the stranger seemed to be amazingly well informed. The business instincts of Olga's husband were uppermost, and he did not like to be drawn away, but he said:

"We shall continue this talk this evening, then."

"No, I regret to say that I can't come; I have made my apologies to Madam Hofmann. I had forgotten an engagement with the Russian Consul for this evening."

"Ah, the Russian Consul will be at our house. Olga, dear, add your entreaties to mine. Persuade Monsieur Millar to come."

In dreadful embarrassment Olga turned to the smiling, cynical mask of a face that looked at her triumphantly. She could not refuse.

"I hope we may have the pleasure of seeing you this evening," she said, and turned wearily toward the door.

"Thank you, madam," the fiend replied. "I shall be more than delighted."

Karl interrupted to say that he would not reach the house that evening before 11 o'clock. He

explained that he expected an art dealer. In reality he had just recalled his promise to stop at the house of Mimi. Herman, suspecting his design, made some jesting allusion to it, which caused Olga to ask what he meant. He evaded her question, and Millar, seeing another excellent opportunity to point a moral, declared that he heard a knock.

He walked over to the door, opened it, and to the amazement of the others, ushered the embarrassed little model into the room.

"The art dealer," he said sarcastically.

Olga felt instantly consumed with jealousy. As she and her husband walked out Millar said to her:

"I will repay you for your invitation, madam. I shall manage to forget my overcoat, and in five minutes I shall return for it and break up the chat which you anticipate with such displeasure."

Olga could not deny the insinuation. She did feel jealous of the pretty model; she did wish that the girl and Karl might not be left alone, and she felt almost grateful to Millar for his promise. Karl had ushered Mimi into the studio, and then he bade his guests good-by. Left alone, he threw himself face downward on the sofa, where Mimi found him a few minutes later.



"THE ART DEALER," HE SAID SARCASTICALLY.—Page 70.

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[Link to larger image](#)

CHAPTER VI

Karl paid no attention to Mimi until she walked over to him and touched him on the shoulder. Then he sat up impatiently.

"Did I not promise to call at your house?" he asked. "Why did you come here?"

"Are you ashamed because I came while all those people were here?" Mimi asked, hurt and drawing away from him.

"Oh, no, not at all. I promised to call, and I can't understand why you did not wait," Karl answered.

Mimi timidly leaned down and put her arms around his neck. Then she said pleadingly:

"Oh, Karl, dear, please don't get married."

"Don't! you'll spoil my collar," Karl exclaimed, trying to avoid her embrace. Mimi began to cry softly.

"Before I saw these people I hardly ever thought of your marriage," she said. "But now—Karl, dear, my heart aches. Please don't get married."

Karl was touched by her grief, in spite of himself. He reached over and patted her cheek.

"There, don't cry, dearie; please don't cry," he said. "It makes you homely."

Mimi brightened instantly, and her tears vanished, leaving her face smiling.

"I am a silly little girl," she said.

"Yes, you are, but I like you very much," Karl said, taking her in his arms. "Now, Mimi, suppose we talk over our marriage quietly and sensibly. You may as well stay, now that you are here. Take off your hat and your jacket."

He arose and was helping her off with her red woolen jacket. Then he hugged her and said as he kissed her lips:

"I am your best friend, after all, Mimi, and you are my——"

The door opened suddenly and Millar entered, taking up Karl's speech with:

"My overcoat; it is here somewhere. Your servant gave me yours."

Karl and Mimi drew away from each other, and Millar looked at them, smiling.

"It's very singular," he said, "but each time I enter your studio I find a lady disrobing. You might think this was a ladies' tailoring establishment."

Mimi looked at Karl jealously as he glared at Millar. Then she burst into tears and ran out of the room. Karl watched her, and as she slammed the door, he turned to Millar and quietly said:

"Thank you very much."

"Oh, don't mention it."

"I will get your overcoat, and don't let me detain you," said Karl with significant emphasis.

"I broke the hanger; your man is mending it and will bring it here," Millar said coolly, ignoring the marked impoliteness.

Karl said nothing more, and after a few minutes of silence Millar resumed:

"I just saw something that touched me deeply. Madam Hofmann clinging to her husband's arm as if she were begging him to protect her——"

"Protect her?" Karl exclaimed angrily. "You don't mean to protect her from me?"

"Look here, Karl, do you think you are wise to be a fool?"

"I prefer not to discuss this subject," Karl answered coldly. "You don't seem to understand my position. Why, it is absurd; I have seen this woman every day for years; met her and her husband; we have been good friends. That's all, absolutely, and had I thought of anything else I should laugh at myself. In wealth, position, everything, she is above me."

"No woman is above her own heart," Millar replied cynically. "Look at her. She is yours if you want her. Just stretch out your hand, my boy, and you have your warmth, your happiness, your joy, unspeakable joy, the most supreme joy possible to a human being, and you are too lazy to reach out your hand. Why, another man would toil night and day, risk life and limb for such a woman; yet she drops into your arms unsought—a found treasure."

Karl laughed bitterly.

"A found treasure," he repeated. "Perhaps that is why I am indifferent."

Millar moved over to where the young artist was seated on the couch and sat beside him. He leaned toward Karl and spoke low and earnestly, keeping his big, black, glittering eyes fixed on him.

"Last fall, on the 6th of September—I shall never forget the date—I had a singular experience," he said. "I put on an old suit of clothes—one I had not worn for some time—and as I picked up the waistcoat a sovereign dropped out from one of the pockets. It had been there no one knew how long. I picked it up, saying to myself, as I turned the gold piece over in my hand, 'I wonder when you got there?' It slipped through my fingers and rolled into some dark corner.

"I searched the room trying to find it, but my sovereign had gone. I became nervous. Again I searched, with no result. I became angry, took up the rugs, moved the furniture about, and I called my man to help me. I grew feverish with the one thought that I must have that sovereign. Suddenly a suspicion seized me. I sprang to my feet and cried to my servant, 'You thief, you have found the sovereign and put it back in your pocket.' He answered disrespectfully. I rushed at him. I saw a knife blade glimmer in his pocket and I drew a pistol—this pistol—from mine."

He drew a shining revolver from his hip pocket and laid it on the table at Karl's elbow.

"And with this pistol I nearly killed a man for a found sovereign which I did not need," he finished quietly.

Karl was profoundly stirred by the story, although he could hardly tell why.

"I give found money away," he said, laughing uncertainly, and adding, "for luck."

"So do I," said Millar quickly, "but it slipped through my fingers, and what slips through our fingers is what we want—we seek it breathlessly—that is human nature. You, too, will seek your found treasure once it slips through your fingers. And then you will find that worthless thing worth everything. You will find it sweet, dear, precious."

Karl turned away from him, trying not to listen to him.

"Kill a man for a found sovereign," he repeated.

"That woman will become sweeter, dearer, more precious to you every day," the malignant one went on, his words searing Karl's soul. "You will realize that she could have given you wings, that she is the warmth, the color—her glowing passion the inspiration of your work. All this you will

realize when she has slipped through your fingers. You might have become a master—a giant. Not by loving your art, but by loving her. Oh, to be kissed by her, to look into her burning eyes and to kiss her warm, passionate mouth."

Karl covered his face with his hands. Millar picked up the delicately scented shawl which had covered Olga's bare shoulders.

"This has touched her bosom," he cried, twining it around Karl's head and shoulders, so that its fragrance reached his nostrils.

The boy lost control of himself and caught the drapery, pressing it to his lips.

"Both so beautiful," Millar persisted in his soft, even, melodious voice. "Oh, what you could be to each other. What divine pleasure you would find."

Dropping the shawl, Karl started to his feet.

"Be quiet! You are trying to drive me mad," he cried. "Do you want to ruin me? For God's sake, man, be still!"

"Afraid again, O Puritan," Millar sneered. "Why, boy, life is only worth living when it is thrown away."

"Why do you tell me that?" Karl demanded. "Why do you hover over me? What do you want? Who sent you?"

"No one; I am here."

He again touched his forehead significantly and Karl shuddered. "I won't do it; no, no, no! Do you hear? I won't," the boy cried hysterically. "I have been her good friend for years—we have been good friends; we will remain good friends. I don't want the found sovereign."

"But if it slips through your fingers," Millar cried. "Suppose another man runs away with her."

"Who?" Karl demanded.

"Myself," Millar replied coolly.

"You!"

"To-night! This very night!" Millar cried, laughing satanically and triumphantly. "To-night I shall play with her as I please. Oh, what joy! What exquisite joy! For ten thousand years no lovelier mistress."

"What's that?" Karl cried, taking a step toward him.

"Mistress, I said—mistress! She will do whatever I wish—to-night, at her home. You will see, when the lights are bright, when the air is filled with perfume—before day dawns, you will see."

"Stop, stop!" Karl cried warningly.

"Be there and you will run after your lost sovereign," Millar went on tauntingly. "Every minute you don't know where she is she is spending with me. A carriage passes you with drawn blinds, and your heart stands still. Who is in it? She and I. You see a couple turn the corner with arms lovingly interlocked. Who was that? She and I—always she and I. We sit in every carriage. We go around every corner. Always she and I—always clinging to each other, always lovingly. The thought maddens you. You run through the streets. A light is extinguished in some room, high up in a house. Who is there? She and I. We stand at the window, arm in arm, looking down into your maddened eyes, and we hold each other closer, and we laugh at you."

"Stop, damn you, stop!" Karl cried, beside himself and trying to shut out the terrible monotony of Millar's voice.

"We laugh at you, you fool," the fiend cried again hoarsely. "And her laughter grows warmer and warmer until she laughs as only a woman can laugh in the midst of delirious joy."

With a maddened scream of rage Karl reached the table with a bound and snatched up the revolver. But Millar, with a spring as lithe and agile as a cat, was there beside him, holding the arm with which he would have shot down the man who was pouring insidious poison into his ears—into his soul.

Millar smiled as he looked at the helpless boy before him. Karl released the revolver, and as he replaced it in his pocket, Millar said quietly:

"You see, Karl, a man may kill a man for a lost sovereign."

Karl's paroxysm of rage and pain over, he threw himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands. He did not even look up as Millar, his cynical glance fixed on him, walked out, closing the door softly behind him. His departure seemed to clear the atmosphere of its oppressive burden of evil, however, and Karl jumped to his feet. He made a few turns up and down the studio and then changed his velvet studio jacket for a greatcoat and plunged out of doors into the storm.

CHAPTER VII

A brisk walk through the snow and gathering darkness revived him and he turned back to the studio with a clearer brain. His old servant, Heinrich, met him at the door.

"Monsieur, the gentleman has returned and is dressing," the old man said, in an awe-struck whisper. "I think he is the devil," he added vindictively.

Heinrich had been terrified when Millar, returning to the studio in Karl's absence, had taken possession, with the utmost coolness, of Karl's guest-chamber and proceeded to change to the evening clothes which had been sent to him there from the tailor's. Unwilling to meet the man again, Karl hurried into his own room and locked the door. He did not emerge again until long after Millar had completed his dressing and had left the studio.

Karl tried desperately to drive thoughts of Olga from his mind; but the terrible flame of passion which had grown from the tiny, buried spark of boy love that lurked in his heart, under the sinister suggestion of Millar, tortured him. He could hardly keep himself from rushing off to Olga's house, in advance of the ball, to beg her not to proceed with her design of bringing him and Elsa together; to tell her that he loved her and that in all the world there lived no other woman for him. Desperately, at last, he remembered his promise to see Mimi, and he hurried out and made his way afoot to the tattered little buildings in which she lived, hoping there to find forgetfulness. But, go where he would, the haunting black eyes, the cynical smile, that even, persistent voice, the insidious suggestions of Millar, the devil, followed him and would not be shaken off.

In a state of mind even more desperate than that of Karl, Olga went home with Herman. Their journey was as silent as their carriage was silent. Herman was absorbed in contemplation of the information Millar had given him regarding business affairs in Russia, in which he was heavily interested. Olga was torn by conflicting emotions. The man had roused in her the dormant love for Karl which she believed buried forever. She could not deny to herself now, as she had denied for six years, that she loved him. She knew now that during those six years it had been to Karl, not to Herman, that she had turned for sympathy, for understanding, and the knowledge maddened her.

Deep in her heart Olga exalted duty before every other virtue, and the duty of a loyal wife before every other duty. She could feel now the crumbling away of all her principles. She had believed for six years that she had given to Herman every bit of her love and loyalty, and now she was forced to the self-confession that she had lived a lie, even to herself. She loved Karl.

But, away from Millar's influence, she resolved that she would yet battle with and overcome the terrible impulses he had aroused. She would make the artist love the beautiful, accomplished girl whom she herself had selected for his bride. She would make him happy; make them both happy, even if it meant that she must crush out her own hopes of happiness in doing so.

"That is a very remarkable man, that friend of Karl's," Herman said after they had driven some time in silence.

"Yes; he is very disagreeable," Olga replied.

"Oh, I don't think so," Herman protested. "To me he seemed very agreeable. Where does he come from? He seems to have been everywhere and to know everybody."

"And everything," assented Olga wearily. "I cannot tell you anything about him. Karl met him a year ago at Monte Carlo."

"I am glad you persuaded him to come to-night," Herman said. "He is going to give me information that will be of great value to me."

Olga was on the point of telling Herman all about the terrible sermon the stranger had preached to them; of his wicked insinuations and of her terrible dread, but she checked herself. Herman seemed fatuously delighted by Millar, and she could not bring herself to talk to him now. They continued the ride in silence until home was reached.

CHAPTER VIII

Herman and Olga occupied one of the finest residences in Park Lane. It had been built by a wealthy nobleman and completed with a princely disregard for expenditure. It stood in the center of a considerable park, surrounded by trees and gardens.

Preparations were already going forward for the ball when Herman and Olga reached home. Decorators were putting the finishing touches on the magnificent ballroom. Florists were banking ferns and potted plants along the stairs and halls. All was bustle and preparation. Herman delightedly went forward and examined every detail of the work. Olga, who ordinarily would have

taken the same keen interest in the preparations, turned wearily away and went to her own room. She dined alone, under the plea of a headache, and did not again appear until the guests began to arrive in the evening.

"You look very beautiful, my dear," Herman said to her when she entered the drawing-room.

Her mood had changed. Her eyes seemed unnaturally bright. She herself could not tell what had caused the change. When she reached home she had looked forward with shuddering aversion to her second meeting with Millar. Now she was impatient for him to arrive. She wanted to talk to him; to hear again the soft, persuasive voice, the insidious harmony of his words that seemed to frame for her the thoughts she had never dared express.

She was bright, alive, witty, charming in the beauty of her fresh color, her glorious hair, her splendid figure set off charmingly in an evening gown of white satin brocade. She stood at the head of the winding stairway leading to the drawing-room when Millar came.

The man seemed more suggestive of malignant purpose in his evening clothes than he had been in the afternoon. Immaculate in every detail of his dress, his very grooming suggested wickedness. He walked slowly up the stairs, feasting his eyes on Olga as she stood with hand extended to meet him.

"Madam, I am charmed to greet you again," he said. "I congratulate you on the wonderful transformation, and I need not ask in what way it was effected."

"It may be that I owe it to you, monsieur," Olga replied gayly, her eyes frankly meeting those of Millar as he looked at her with admiration he did not attempt to disguise.

"I trust we are soon to have the pleasure of seeing Karl again."

"He will be here—later, I believe," Olga answered. "Meanwhile, monsieur, I am going to ask you to make yourself agreeable to some of my guests."

"Madam, I can only make myself disagreeable to them," he replied cynically. "It is not they whom I came to see and entertain."

"But you must be entertained now," Olga said. "Soon I hope we may talk."

"We shall talk," Millar assured her, bowing.

He passed on to greet Herman, and was presented to others in the rapidly growing throng. Wherever he went Olga heard exclamations usually of surprise or dismay from her women guests, and the number that invariably gathered around him at first rapidly diminished. He seemed bent on making himself disagreeable, as he had promised.

One elderly spinster to whom he was presented greeted him with an affected lisp, drooping eyes and an inane remark about the terrible cold.

"Yes, mademoiselle, your teeth will chatter to-night—on the dresser."

To another—a portly lady who affected the airs of a girl—he said in his most silken tones:

"My dear madam, I must tell you of a splendid remedy for getting thin."

"I don't want to get thin," the portly one replied indignantly as she flounced away from him.

Olga waited impatiently for an opportunity to withdraw with Millar into a secluded place, where she might listen to him while he told her the things that she did not dare tell herself. The evening had grown late, however, and Karl had arrived before she could get away from her guests.

Karl had tried to avoid a tête-à-tête with Olga, and she took the first opportunity of introducing him to Elsa. She rebelled in her soul now at the thought of their marriage, but her will drove her to the fulfilment of her purpose, to that extent at least. But it was with a heart torn with jealousy that she watched Karl and Elsa move off together, and turned to meet Millar, standing beside her with his cynical, sinister smile.

Elsa Berg was a brilliant, vivacious girl, rarely beautiful, with lively blue eyes, chestnut hair and a tall, slender, willowy figure. The romance and excitement of her meeting with Karl made her seem doubly beautiful, and she gladdened the artist in him, but he helplessly confessed to himself that she made no impression on his heart. His thoughts were with Olga, and he was abstracted, almost to the point of rudeness, while Elsa tried to talk with him.

"Who is that terribly rude person who seems to be frightening every one?" she asked.

"He? Oh, that is Dr. Millar, a friend of mine," Karl replied.

"Pooh! I don't see why every one seems so afraid of him," Elsa said with a note of challenge in her tone. "I think I shall meet him just to see if he will make me run."

"No, no; don't go near him," Karl begged.

"And why not? Has he such a sharp tongue or an evil mind? I can take care of myself."

"I don't really think you ought to meet him," Karl said, but he spoke without conviction. He suddenly yielded to a curiosity to see what might come of a meeting between Elsa and Millar.

"I don't care; I'm going to hunt him up," she cried, jumping up and scampering off.

Millar had gone into an anteroom leading out into the beautiful gardens. A number of the company had assembled there as he entered, and it was obvious from the instant silence which ensued that he had been the subject of their discussion. This seemed to gratify his cynical humor, and he looked the assembled men and women—society puppets—over with a cynical grin. Elsa was among them, and toward her Millar bowed as he said:

"I never knew this number of ladies could be so silent. I presume during my absence you have been discussing me kindly."

The others did not speak, but Elsa turned boldly to Millar.

"Don't flatter yourself that I am afraid of you," she said. "I would say to your face what these people only dare think. Indeed, I was just going to look for you."

"It is just as well you are here; they might discuss you and your approaching betrothal with Karl," Millar said.

"You—you know!" Elsa cried in astonishment.

The others seemed tremendously interested at the information Millar had imparted, and Elsa was embarrassed. She knew the design of her friend Olga in bringing her and Karl together, but she was not aware that it was known to any one else. Millar smiled as he replied:

"Of course; they would throw you into his arms."

While the others who overheard laughed at this sally and Elsa blushed furiously, Millar went close to her and said:

"I must speak to you alone. I will send these people away. Leave it to me."

Elsa drew away and there was a silence in the room. The others began to feel uncomfortable as Millar looked slowly from one to the other of them. One or two essayed conversation, and his cutting, insolent replies sent them scurrying from the room. In a few moments only he and Elsa remained in the apartment. From the adjoining ballroom came the strains of music and the sound of dancing and bright laughter. Millar looked at Elsa.

"Now they are gone," he said.

"Are you not surprised that I did not go also?" she asked. "You offended me, you know, but I stayed because I want to talk with you."

"How charming," Millar said with gentle sarcasm.

"Perhaps you know my nickname—Saucy Elsa?" said the girl warningly.

"Oh, yes."

"Then you should know that your Chesterfieldian manners embarrass me," Elsa said impatiently as Millar bowed again before her. "I have selected you to deliver a most impudent message to that crowd in there, because you are so perfectly impolite."

"I am entirely at your disposal, mademoiselle."

"How can I be impudent, though, when you are so polite to me?" she cried petulantly.

"Shall we end the conversation, then?"

"Oh, no, not yet," Elsa cried, embarrassed. Then she went on with determination: "When you came in here you said I was the girl they were going to throw into Karl's arms."

"I did."

"But you did not say that I am the girl who permits herself to be thrown into Karl's arms. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Please sit down," Elsa went on, recovering her self-poise, which the baffling politeness of Millar had disturbed.

He declined the chair with a gesture, but she insisted.

"I feel much more commanding when I stand, and I want every advantage," she said. "I want to set you right, and it will be much easier when you sit down and I stand."

Smiling, Millar sat down and looked up at her expectantly. Slightly confused, she went on:

"I don't want people making fun of me before my face. I know everything. Do I make myself clear? You were kind enough to mention the subject, and I shall delegate to you the mission of explaining the true facts to those dummies."

She grew quite vehement, and her cheeks flushed. Millar looked at her admiringly as he said:

"Your confidence does me great honor."

"As a rule I don't take these people seriously," the girl hurried on. "I have no more interest in them or their opinions than I have in last week's newspapers. But I want them all to know that they have not fooled me into marrying Karl. And you all want me to marry him—you all want to throw me into his arms."

"Pardon me——" Millar interrupted, but she went on, unheeding.

"Don't you think I can see through your transparent schemes? But I'll marry him just the same, if he'll have me. Do you understand? I'll marry him."

"I do not think you will," Millar said quietly.

"I tell you I am going to be Karl's wife," Elsa cried with emphasis.

"Now that you have graced me with your confidence," Millar said, rising, "I feel that I may be quite frank with you. This marriage cannot take place."

He pointed to the chair he had vacated and smiled.

"Now, you sit down, because I am going to set you right," he said.

Wonderingly, Elsa obeyed. Millar called a servant who was passing, and said:

"You will find a small red leather case in my overcoat pocket. Bring it here."

The servant went out and he continued to Elsa:

"I know the reason of this marriage, but you—you don't know the reason, or——"

"Or what?"

"Or you don't want to know. Hence you are about to consent."

"Consent to what?" Elsa cried. "Don't beat around the bush. This is what I am trying to avoid. I am about to consent to become the wife of a man who loves another woman. And, what is more, I intend to go on my honeymoon with a man who has another woman in his heart—who leaves with this other woman everything he should bring to his wife—love, sympathy, enthusiasm, everything. You see, you did not know me."

Millar was unmoved by her vehement declaration. As the servant re-entered the room and handed him a small, red leather case, he said:

"I did not think this subject could excite you to such a degree."

"I don't want any one laughing at me," Elsa protested. "I want them all to understand that I know quite well the way I am going, and that I go that way proudly, fully conscious of it—that I know everything and yet I consent to be his wife."

"Why?" Millar asked, opening his little satchel.

"Because—because—I—I love him," the girl answered, and began to sob.

Millar smiled wickedly as he took from the case a dainty lace handkerchief and held it toward Elsa.

"Pardon me, I always carry this with me," he said. "It is my weeping bag. In it is everything a woman needs for weeping."

Elsa sobbed and dabbed at her eyes with the handkerchief, not noticing that the man was amused.

"I—I love him," she declared.

"And take this also," Millar said, handing her a little mirror, then a powder puff and a tiny stick of rouge. Elsa could not help smiling through her tears at the absurdity of it, as she dabbed and dusted her tear-stained face, looking at herself in the little mirror, until all traces of her weeping were removed.

"So this is the far-famed Saucy Elsa," Millar said as he watched her.

"No, it isn't," she said rebelliously. "When I came here to-night I was a young, saucy girl. Now I am a nervous old woman. What shall I do?"

"Whatever you do, you must not be discouraged. You must fight—attack the enemy. But first of all you must be pretty."

"I shall try," Elsa said dolefully.

"You must show that woman your teeth. Of course it is hard for a young girl to fight a woman," Millar went on. "You don't possess so many weapons as a married woman who knows love already—who—may I say something improper?"

"Please do," she said, her sauciness returning as she held her hands before her eyes and looked at him through her fingers.

"A woman who knows all about love that you have yet to learn."

"I understand," she said.

"But don't mind that; listen. There is not much sentiment in me, but I am a man, and I tell you, little girl, you possess the weapon that will deal the death blow to the most attractive, the most experienced woman in the world. That weapon is purity."

"Should I listen to all this?" Elsa asked.

"You should not," Millar replied promptly; "but listen just the same. It may help you. And now, go dance with Karl. You must conquer. But don't try to be a woman; be a girl. Don't try to be saucy."

"I don't care to be saucy, but it is so original," Elsa said contritely.

"Don't try to be original," Millar said earnestly. "Be yourself. Be modest. Be ashamed of your pure white shoulders. Look at Karl as if you feared he is trying to steal you away from girlhood land and show you the way to woman's land. And if any one ever dares to call you saucy again, tell him you once met a gentleman to whom you wanted to give a piece of your mind and that you left him with a piece of his mind, feeling very small indeed yourself, and making him feel as if he were the biggest rascal in the world."

Elsa turned and went toward the other room, meeting Karl at the door as Millar withdrew behind a curtain of palms.

CHAPTER IX

Millar had played with devilish ingenuity on the tender susceptibilities of Elsa. He encouraged her in her love for Karl and her determination to win him, evidently with the deliberate purpose that she should repel the boy whose will he had determined to subordinate to his own. He watched as a cat watches its prey the meeting between Karl and Elsa after he withdrew quietly into the sheltering recess behind the palms.

Karl had been searching for her and stopped, barring her way into the ballroom.

"So here you are at last, Miss Elsa," he exclaimed.

"Yes," Elsa replied, dropping her eyes demurely.

"Why are you not in the ballroom?"

"I wanted to be alone. If any one really wanted me he could find me."

Her dejection surprised Karl.

"You seem sad. Are you worried?"

"No."

"Then what has happened?" Karl asked.

He walked toward her, and as he did so Millar emerged from his place of concealment. Karl looked at him.

"Ah, now I understand," he said.

"Surely you do not mean to suspect that I am the cause of Miss Elsa's unhappiness," he said blandly.

Karl ignored him and turned to Elsa, looking at her in frank admiration.

"You are very pretty to-night," he said, going close to her. "It is because you are yourself—a sweet, pure, natural girl. I like you better this way, Elsa. I could take you in my arms and hug you."

"Oh, Karl!" Elsa exclaimed, blushing and hiding her face.

Millar's cynical smile overspread his face, and he turned away, well satisfied with the progress he was making.

"Excuse me," he murmured. "I must say good-evening to our hostess," and he stole quietly out.

The two young people did not notice him. They sat down very close to each other, Karl leaning forward and looking into the big blue eyes of the girl. Elsa gave a glance at the disappearing figure of Millar.

"I am awfully glad to be alone with you, Elsa," Karl said. "You are the one natural thing in this fetid, artificial atmosphere. Don't you feel warm?"

"Yes, as if some hot breeze were blowing through this room. It stifles me."

"You never spoke like that before," Karl said.

His back was toward the ballroom door and he did not see Millar usher Olga into the room. The

man had brought Olga that she might witness the fulfilment of her plan, and that he might triumph in her jealousy and further thwart them. Elsa saw them come in and seat themselves across the room.

"There is Olga," she said, "and she, too, is jealous. Don't you want to speak to her?"

"I have seen her," Karl replied without turning around. "I would rather talk with you. It's far more interesting."

"They are talking about us," Elsa said warningly, as she saw Olga and Millar look toward them.

"Oh, what of it?" Karl exclaimed impatiently. "Let us be glad we are together. I am just beginning to know you, Elsa."

"Why do you look around, then?" Elsa said.

"Am I looking around?" Karl asked. "I wasn't aware of it."

But even as he spoke he could not help furtively glancing around to see what Millar and Olga were doing. He remembered the man's declaration in the studio that afternoon and he distrusted and feared him. He was beginning to hate him.

By a sheer effort of will he forced himself to turn to Elsa. He resolved that he would talk to her; that he would make love to her; that he would marry her and banish from his heart those hateful emotions which Millar had aroused. He leaned forward and spoke of love to the girl in low tones, while Elsa, with color coming and going in her face, listened and watched the woman she knew for her rival.

"Our first love usually is our last love—our last love always is the first," Karl said.

"I don't know," Elsa cried demurely. "I have never been in love, although I was disappointed twice," she added gayly.

Karl was beginning to find his task difficult. His attention wandered to Olga.

"Disappointments; well, yes, who has not been disappointed?"

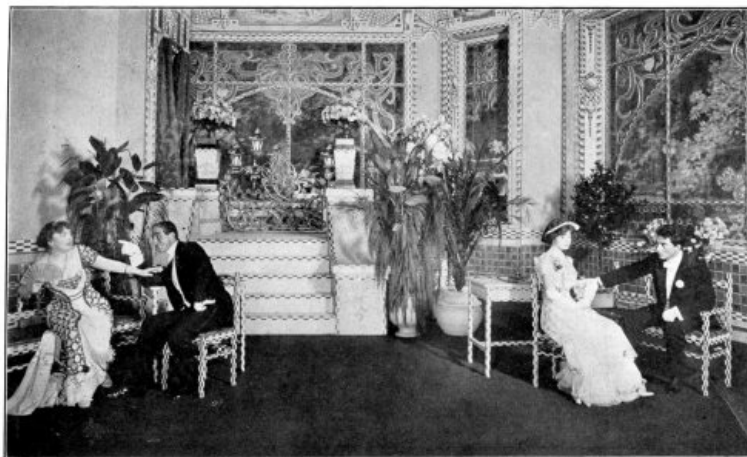
Elsa observed his growing inattention, his efforts to concentrate his thoughts on their talk, his futile love-making, and she turned from him coldly. Meanwhile Millar and Olga were having a conversation in which Olga was being torn on the rack of her jealous emotions.

Millar had brought her into the anteroom to show her Karl making love to Elsa. Every circumstance favored his design. Olga at first was disposed to withdraw when she saw them.

"Don't you think we should leave the young people together?" she said.

"You are too considerate," Millar replied cynically.

"They seem to be growing fond of each other," Olga said jealously.



"THEY SEEM TO BE GROWING FOND OF EACH OTHER," OLGA SAID JEALOUSLY.—Page 108.

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[Link to larger image](#)

"Yes; do you dislike it?"

"No."

"Shall we leave now?"

"No; I rather enjoy watching my seed bear fruit."

Olga tried to speak lightly and smile. Millar, watching her closely, saw her lips twitch, and it was with difficulty that she controlled herself.

"They are an interesting couple," he said.

"Can't we discuss something besides these two?" Olga asked impatiently.

"Yes, certainly," Millar acquiesced. "I came here to-night to decide a wager," he went on.

"What was it?" Olga asked absently, looking with jealous eyes at Elsa and Karl.

"I made a wager that you would fall in love with me to-night."

Olga was startled by the declaration, but she treated it lightly as one of Millar's strange sayings.

"With whom did you make such a wager?" she asked.

"With Karl," Millar answered quickly.

"Karl—and what did he say?" Olga cried, almost rising from her seat.

"I must not tell you now; it might hurt you."

"Oh, no, it won't; please tell me now," Olga pleaded, leaning over the table toward him.

Millar, too, leaned forward, his face almost touching her white shoulder, his hand touching hers as it rested on the table. It was thus Karl saw them with one of those furtive glances, and the glist froze the pretty speech he was trying to make to Elsa. The girl, seeing his look, jumped to her feet, exclaiming angrily, and so that all three heard her:

"Take me to the ballroom immediately. I have promised the next dance."

Karl also, his face white with passion, had jumped to his feet. Elsa, almost in tears, stamped her foot at him.

"Why do you stand there? Take me away. Aren't you coming?"

She turned and started to the door, Karl following. They passed Millar and Olga, still seated at the table.

"I thought you were in the ballroom," Olga said sweetly to the girl.

"Oh, did you?"

"I hope you are enjoying the dancing."

"I hate dancing, but I shall dance every dance to-night," Elsa cried passionately.

She looked angrily at Olga, who arose and moved toward her. Karl stepped between them, giving his arm to Elsa. The two walked together, leaving Olga looking helplessly into the smiling face of Millar.

Olga looked angrily at the stormy little Elsa as she floundered from the room into the ballroom, followed by the enraged Karl. Millar smiled more cynically than ever as he saw the play of emotion on Olga's face. His ruse had worked admirably. He had at least beaten down Olga's will, but he had yet to make certain of Karl.

"How dared she speak like that?" Olga demanded, turning to her cynic Millar. "Karl must love her."

"Let us not reach conclusions so hastily," Millar said. "First let me tell you how Karl answered me this afternoon."

"When you made the wager?" Olga asked quickly.

"Yes; when I promised to make you fall in love with me."

"What did he say?"

"He tried to kill me," Millar answered slowly.

The color rushed to Olga's cheeks. Her eyes sparkled as she turned them toward her tempter. It was delight she felt; mad, unreasoning joy that Karl's love for her had prompted him to kill another who threatened to win her from him. Still smiling, Millar went on, taking the shining revolver from his pocket and showing it to her:

"With his own hands, dear lady, Karl tried to kill me with this little pistol. I took it away from him."

"He tried to shoot you?" Olga exclaimed.

"Yes; and he would have done so. This is nicely loaded for six."

Almost to herself Olga whispered her next words:

"This afternoon he wanted to kill you when you only spoke of making love to me, and now—he saw you whisper in my ear, hold my hand, touch my shoulders. Why, he must have fallen in love with—"

"Don't you think it silly to shoot a friend on account of a woman?" Millar interrupted, before she could pronounce Elsa's name.

"Oh, he's fond of me—perhaps you said something about me," Olga stumbled on hurriedly. "Karl holds me in high regard, but, there is no doubt of it, these young people are in love."

"I fear you regret the success of your matrimonial scheme for Karl and Elsa," Millar said.

"Do you think it will be successful?" she asked eagerly.

"I don't know, but we may find out easily enough."

"How?"

Millar took a turn up and down the room, his up-slanting eyebrows drawn together in deep thought.

"This afternoon he tried to shoot me when I told him I would make you fall in love with me," he said, stopping in front of Olga. "That means love. Don't speak to me of respect or regard, my dear lady. They fire off cannons in salute out of respect, but when they draw pistols, that means love. Now, you think Karl loves this little girl. Suppose we find out who is right. We will make Karl tell us himself."

Olga turned away with a gesture of dissent, but Millar went on insinuatingly:

"Of course, I understand it interests you only because you planned this marriage, and after all it is only right that you should feel a certain amount of pride in the success of your plans. Is it not so?"

"Yes, that is true."

"Very well, then; Karl shall tell us which was real—his attempt to murder me or this little affair with Elsa."

"But how—you don't mean to ask Karl?" Olga asked in bewilderment. "You are not going to listen at key-holes?"

"Oh, madam, no."

"Then how can we make him tell us?"

"It is simple; I have a plan. But you must follow my instructions to the letter. Don't ask for any reasons; simply do as I say."

Olga looked at him reflectively. She knew instinctively that he had some new bit of devilish ingenuity, some sinister twist of that marvelous brain, and she was afraid. But she wanted more than anything else to be assured that Karl did not love Elsa; that her scheme for their marriage had failed, and she replied:

"Very well, it is agreed."

"I saw you once at the opera with a very beautiful cloak that covered you completely from your neck to your shoe tips. Have you such a cloak now?"

"Yes."

"Good. Put this cloak on. Let only your bare neck show above it and the tips of your shoes beneath. Button it from top to bottom, as if you felt cold. Then we shall need but the presence of yourself and Karl, here in this room, to solve the problem."



"LET ONLY YOUR BARE NECK SHOW ABOVE YOUR CLOAK, AND THE TIPS OF YOUR SHOES BENEATH IT."—Page 115.

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Olga looked at Millar a moment in silence. There flashed instantly through her mind the full meaning of his daring suggestion, and at first she was on the point of indignant refusal. Then she as quickly resolved to carry out the scheme; to beat the man at his own cunning game; to find out for herself what Karl really felt.

"Unconditionally obey me and we shall know everything," Millar assured her, observing her hesitation.

"This is very mysterious," Olga said slowly. "What strange influence do you possess that compels me to obey your will? Your eyes seem to have all the wisdom of the world behind them."

"You do my eyes poor, scant justice," Millar replied. "Now go, dear madam. If any one expresses astonishment that you wear a cloak indoors, simply say that you felt cold."

"It really is cold," Olga said with a little shiver as they turned away.

"Out this way," Millar said quickly, pointing to the palms and a door beyond them. "Karl is coming."

Olga gathered her skirts up and hurried from the room just as Karl entered. The young artist caught a glimpse of her dress as she disappeared behind the palms. He looked at Millar with jealous rage making his eyes glow.

"Who was that?" he demanded.

"Who?" Millar asked, blandly.

"Did Olga run away from me?"

"No one ran from you that I know of, Karl. That is a pretty girl, my young friend, that little Elsa."

"Yes, she is pretty," Karl replied absently, sitting down at a table.

He was still tortured by the sight of Millar leaning over Olga, touching her hands, whispering in her ear. He was tormented by the insinuating words the man had uttered in the afternoon when he swore that Olga should love him; should be his. He would have liked to take Millar's throat in his two hands and throttle him.

Keenly aware of the inferno he had raised in Karl, Millar continued to chat affably, Karl not deigning to answer. Finally Millar said:

"You seem annoyed."

Karl lost control of himself and leaped to his feet. He went close to Millar, staring into his eyes.

"I am annoyed. Do you want to know why?" he demanded, putting all the insolence he could command into his tone.

"No," Millar replied with a smile.

"I want to tell you why," Karl declared.

"Please don't," Millar said deprecatingly.

"Yes, I will," Karl went on belligerently. "I am amazed at the change which has come over you since this afternoon. Don't imagine that it is on account of Olga—we won't discuss her at all."

"Certainly not; she is out of the question," Millar assented warmly.

"Absolutely," Karl went on. "I came here this evening determined to ask Elsa to marry me."

"Fine! I am very glad to hear it. I wish you good luck, my boy!" Millar cried with enthusiasm.

"You are glad?"

"Delighted," Millar assured him.

"It does not take you long to change your mind," Karl continued, still with a truculent air. "This afternoon you insisted I should not marry Elsa. To-night you are delighted at the prospect."

"Oh, yes; I see the matter now in a different light."

"Then it was Olga who ran away as I entered!" Karl almost shouted, glaring at him menacingly.

"Ran away? Why should she run away?" Millar asked, pretending embarrassment.

"Don't act like a cad!" Karl cried threateningly.

"What do you mean, Karl?"

"I mean exactly what I say. Don't act like a cad. If you were a gentleman you would hide your pleasure."

Millar pretended to be shocked at the indignation of the young artist, which secretly delighted him.

"Don't talk that way, Karl," he urged. "As you seem to have penetrated my secret, I suppose I might as well—but have you made up your mind to marry Elsa?"

"Absolutely."

"And you will not change your mind—you promise?"

"I will not change my mind."

"Well, of course, if that is the case, I can tell you. I——"

He hesitated as if embarrassed at his own question. Karl cried roughly:

"And did you succeed?"

"Well, I——"

"What of her husband?"

"Ah, Karl, he is deaf, dumb and blind," Millar cried gleefully.

Stifled with the pain at his heart, Karl turned away.

"This afternoon, at my house, you met her for the first time," he said.

"Ah, Karl, she is a clever woman; cleverer than I thought," Millar said, affecting tremendous enthusiasm. "She deceived me this afternoon about her true character; she has been deceiving all of you. I am sure of it. Oh, she is grand, fantastic, passionate, daring. Think of it, Karl," he went on, going close to the boy and leaning over him, bringing out his words so that every one seemed to penetrate his heart; "think of it, to-night a kiss behind a door in front of which her husband was standing. Danger fascinates her. And just now, a moment before you came, we agreed——"

"So it was she?" Karl interrupted.

"Oh, yes, it was she," Millar admitted. "I suggested a wild plan, Karl; almost too daring for the first day of our acquaintance. Her honor, position, everything depend upon its success. Of course I did not dream she would carry it out. I suggested it merely to sound the depths of her passion. But she loved the idea and insisted upon doing it this very night. If it fails we are lost."

Karl trembled with apprehension for Olga, whom he believed in the devilish power of this man.

"What is it?" he asked.

"She will be here in one minute, dressed in an opera cloak—and nothing else. Think of it, Karl; the daring of it. She will walk through the ballroom on my arm, among all those people, her friends, her husband, with no one in the secret but we two—and you. Ah, Karl, I told you she would be mine," Millar concluded with rapturous accents.

With a wild cry Karl sprang at Millar, hurling one word at him:

"Liar!"

"Karl, be careful," Millar protested, avoiding him.

"It's a lie; a damnable, dirty lie!" Karl cried, trying blindly to reach him, to grasp his throat to throttle him.

Millar deftly avoided him and laughed triumphantly.

"I have trapped you who tried to trap me," he cried. "You love Olga Hofmann."

"Yes, I love her," Karl cried loudly. "I love her, and yet I will marry Elsa. Now, I have listened to your infernal lies; I have watched you gloat over them. Men like you steal a woman's reputation and boast of it and call it a success. But you shall pay for it, now, this minute, when I kick you out of the house. Out with you, like a sneak-thief that you are!"

He advanced determinedly on Millar, who quietly faced him.

"Remember, Karl, that I have the pistol now," he said coolly.

"Out with you, you sneak-thief; I am not afraid of you," Karl cried again.

He was about to seize Millar by the throat, when he started back in amazement at what seemed to be the fulfilment of the other's sinister promise. Olga stepped through the door into the room. She was clothed from head to foot in a beautiful, shimmering, fur-trimmed cloak.

Above the top button gleamed her bare throat. Her white arms projected from the short sleeves. The hem of the skirt fell to the tips of her white satin shoes.

As Olga entered she gave one glance at Karl and then moved away from him, and stood beside the table at which she and Millar had been seated. She saw the wild rage stamped on his face, and her woman's intuition made her know that Millar had told him what she had divined he meant. The situation frightened her, and she felt on the point of fleeing from the room or casting aside the cloak; but she resolved to see the game through.

Karl stared at her, rage giving place to amazement, then to despair. For full a minute no one spoke. The music floated in softly from the ballroom, mingled with the hum of voices and laughter. Olga was the first to break the stillness, but she did not look at him as she spoke.

"Karl, this is the first time I have had a chance to talk with you to-night," she said.

"What is that?" Karl absently asked.

He had not heard; his mind was confused, bewildered. Millar, cynically misunderstanding his question, said quickly:

"Why, that is an opera cloak."

Olga turned quickly, fearful that the remark might cause an eruption which she could not control. She cried impulsively, seeking to divert the threatening train of conversation:

"The ball is a great success. Every one is merry; every one dances as if it were the first affair of the season. The girls are all as happy as young widows who have just taken off mourning."

"I have observed it," Millar agreed with enthusiasm. "It is splendid. But why is Karl so sad amid all this merry-making?" he added.

"Why are you sad, Karl?" Olga asked, turning to him.

"I sad? You are silly," Karl cried with forced gayety. "I never felt happier in all my life."

There was a touch of hysteria in his voice that made Olga's heart go out to him.

"I am glad you are having such a good time," she said.

"Yes, yes; I feel like a schoolboy," Karl cried wildly; "like a young tiger. I'm mad with joy. I will get drunk to-night. I will drink, drink drink until the angels in heaven sing to me—as you said this afternoon," he added, turning to Millar.

"No, no, Karl," Olga pleaded, thoroughly frightened. "Why, you never drank. Why should you drink to-night?"

"Because I am doing things to-night I never did before," Karl replied bitterly. "I have never been engaged before; to-night I shall be engaged."

"Good! fine, Karl," Millar exclaimed. "She is a splendid girl."

"Splendid girl! What do I care what sort of a girl she is? It's not the girl; it's marriage—something new. I want to see what it is like."

"For a bridegroom you are not very gay," Millar said tauntingly.

"Gay! Why should I be gay? I am drinking the last bitter drops of my bachelor days—but I'll swallow them, and then—purity."

"Bravo, Karl!" Olga said.

"Oh, I don't care what any one else thinks about it," Karl sneered at her. "I am doing this to

please myself."

Olga was hurt and surprised at his tone. She had never seen him so completely beside himself before; she had never heard him speak so bitterly, so vindictively. As she watched him he looked at her, and a spasm of pain contorted his face. He pointed his finger at her accusingly, and cried:

"Why are you wearing that cloak in the house?"

"Madam Hofmann may be cold," Millar suggested quietly.

"Yes, yes; I am cold," Olga said hurriedly, drawing the cloak around her more closely.

"You are fortunate to have such a beautiful cloak," Millar said, determined now to keep them at the main point of his game.

"Suppose we do not talk about the cloak," Olga said. "You and Elsa seemed to get on nicely to-night, Karl."

"Yes," he replied absently.

"Really, it was charming to watch such devoted young people," Millar said.

Karl flashed a look of hatred at him and turned again to Olga.

"That cloak is lined with fur, isn't it?"

Before she could reply Millar had interrupted in his silken, insinuating voice:

"Yes, soft, smooth fur."

"I did not speak to you," Karl cried at him savagely. "Well?" he demanded of Olga.

"Soft, smooth fur," Olga replied. "It is cold in here."

"Nonsense; it is hot. I feel stifling," Karl declared.

"I feel chilly," Olga insisted.

"Perhaps madam is not dressed warmly enough," Millar insinuated. "You should wear plenty of clothes in the winter time, or you may run the chance of taking cold."

Olga caught her breath and then she answered:

"I love to take chances."

"You do, eh?" Karl cried.

"Yes; what is it to you?" she asked tauntingly.

Karl threw his self-control to the winds. With flaming face and a voice that shook with anger, he cried:

"Aren't you two afraid of me?"

Olga was afraid and she looked at him apprehensively. Millar smiled his cynical, sinister smile and answered:

"Afraid? I'm not afraid of the husband. Why should I be afraid of a moralizing, joyless bridegroom?"

Karl took a step toward him, when Herman entered the room. All three were silent and Herman looked at them in surprise.

"What is this—a conspiracy?" he asked gayly.

"Oh, no, merely a conversation," Millar said.

"Well, Karl, how are you getting along with Elsa?" Herman asked, taking the boy by the arm and walking off with him.

Olga watched them as they disappeared, going into the ballroom, Karl evidently reluctant to be taken away. Then she turned to Millar.

"What did you tell him about my cloak?"

"About the cloak? Nothing."

"You did not tell him——"

"What?"

"He stared at me as if he thought—thought I had on only this cloak."

"That is exactly what I told him," Millar assured her.

"Oh, how could you?"

"Now don't be shocked," Millar said cynically. "You knew it. The moment you entered the room you realized that I had told him. And what is more you liked it."

"How dare you!" Olga gasped, "If I had understood——"

"If you had understood, would you have taken off the cloak?"

"Yes."

"Well, now you understand, why do you not take it off?"

Olga raised her head and looked straight into Millar's eyes. She said not a word, but drew her cloak more closely about her with a movement that sent a thrill of suspicion and surprise through him.

"Madam, you didn't really?" he cried in amazement.

"Do you think I am a child?" she asked. "Do you imagine that I did not understand your suggestion from the very first? You wanted me to fool Karl. Perhaps I have fooled you. How do you know I am not nude beneath this cloak?"

"Madam!" Millar cried in wide-eyed amazement.

"Now let us see if you will take a chance," Olga said. "Give me your arm, my dear doctor, and we will walk together through the ballroom."

Millar was at a loss for a moment. His imperturbable calm was broken. Olga had matched her woman's intuition against his cunning and had won. But his bewilderment gave way to undisguised admiration, and, bowing as gallantly as a youthful sweetheart, he gave her his arm.

As they were about to leave, however, Karl suddenly barred their way, coming hurriedly in from the ballroom.

"Are you coming in with us, Karl?" Olga asked, as they paused.

"No," Karl almost shouted; "and you are not going—you stay here."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what I said. You stay here. And you, too," he added to Millar.

He turned and closed the ballroom door. Then he faced them again.

"We will settle this thing right here. Take off that cloak."

"I will not."

"By heavens, I'll tear it off," he cried furiously, rushing at her.

Olga stood unmoved. Millar caught Karl by the arm and stopped him.

"Why did you stop him?" Olga asked, smiling.

She was perfectly self-possessed now and in command of the situation. Millar was frankly afraid that she had taken his meaning literally. Karl was mad with rage and jealousy. Olga was unruffled.

"Madam, I was afraid," Millar said.

"You will take it off," Karl cried, still held back by Millar. "If you do not, I'll find your husband and he shall have the pleasure."

Olga turned to him sweetly.

"Karl, will you help me off with my cloak?" she asked.

Karl almost leaped toward her, but when his hands nearly touched her cloak he drew back, afraid. Slowly he backed away from her, while she smiled.

"Dr. Millar, will you help me remove my cloak?" she asked sweetly.

Millar put out his hands as if to do so, but quickly folded them over his breast, bowed very low and smiled, cynically shaking his head.

Olga looked first at one and then the other with her tantalizing smile. The three might have been carved of stone, so still were they when Herman entered.

"Hello, Karl; I lost you when I went to find Elsa," he said. "What are you talking about?"

"I think we have been discussing cloaks," Millar said.

"Oh, I see Olga is wearing one. Isn't it rather warm for that, dear?"

"Yes, it is, but I felt chilly a while ago," Olga answered. "Will you help me off with it, Herman?"

Herman stepped to her side as she loosened the clasps, and lifted the beautiful fur-lined garment from her shoulders. She stood before them again in the beauty of her shimmering evening gown, her white arms and shoulders gleaming, her lips parted in a dazzling smile.

Karl did not speak. He half involuntarily made a step toward Olga, and she, fearing what he

might say, cried lightly:

"Now, I have devoted too much time to you two. My guests are departing. I must go. Come, Herman."

CHAPTER X

Herman took his wife's arm, and together they returned to the ballroom. Karl watched them disappear and turned on Millar as if to attack him. There was such menace in his manner, the frenzied appearance of his face, that Millar put his hand behind him quickly and half drew his revolver.

Before either spoke, however, Elsa entered from the ballroom. She was in her cloak, ready to leave, and said, holding out her hand to Karl:

"I wanted to say good-by."

Her voice seemed to awaken Karl as from a bad dream. He took her hand eagerly, stepped forward impulsively as if he would take her in his arms and kiss her, but Millar interposed himself between them, and a servant entered at the same moment. Checked in his advance, Karl said:

"I shall take you to your carriage."

The servant announced that Elsa's aunt awaited her. She took Karl's arm, and Millar directed the servant to follow them.

"The sidewalk is very slippery," he said. "Take Miss Elsa's other arm."

He was determined not to give the beautiful girl a chance alone with Karl. In the young artist's present excited state almost anything might occur to wreck his plans.

As the two went out, followed by the servant, Olga came in excitedly. She looked around to see that Millar was alone and said:

"Your plan worked splendidly."

"What are you going to do now?" asked Millar anxiously, as Olga sat at a table and took out writing materials.

"I am going to write to him," she answered, addressing an envelope.

"But what will you say?"

"I shall tell him," Olga said wearily, with her hands clasped to her forehead, "never to speak to me again. I never want to see him. He must leave town immediately. To think he believed me capable of——"

"Of what?"

"Ah, it is all over," Olga cried, ignoring him. "I never want to see him again, because——"

"Because you love him?"

"Oh, no. After what has happened I hate him."

"I am very sorry, madam," Millar said contritely.

"You need not be," Olga assured him. "I am glad it happened. With all your cynicism you are clever and you have done me a great service. When I know that this letter is in his hands again I shall be perfectly happy," she went on, dipping her pen in the ink-well.

"You say I have helped you; let me render you one more service," Millar urged.

"What can that be?" Olga asked.

"I have begun this; let me finish it. Let me dictate this letter. You are excited. You cannot think of things to say. It must be firm, strong."



"I HAVE BEGUN THIS, LET ME FINISH IT. LET ME DICTATE THIS LETTER."—Page 136.

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[Link to larger image](#)

"Yes, firm, strong," Olga acquiesced.

"Undoubtedly," Millar went on. "Let me tell you what to say."

Wearily Olga yielded to his spell. She seemed under hypnotic influence as she replied:

"Very well, I shall write whatever you tell me to say."

Millar stood behind her chair, hovering over her like an evil spirit. His singular, expressive hands twitched.

"Good. I shall try to express your thoughts," he said. "Cold, formal?"

"Yes, it must be so," Olga said.

"It is finished forever?"

"Forever."

"Then write," he ordered.

She settled herself to her task. Leaning over her, Millar suggested a sinister hypnotist bending a helpless victim to his will. He dictated, while Olga wrote:

"I have found out what I dreaded to learn—that you love me. Your behavior to-night convinced me. I could not place any other interpretation on it, and my own heart answered, I cannot, dare not, see you again. God knows I want to; I long for the happiness that I might find with you, but I must not. Only the certainty that I am not to see you impels me to this confession. Good-by forever."

When this was finished Olga dropped her pen and stared at the letter. Before she could do anything, Millar had taken the sheet of paper, blotted it, folded it and placed it within the envelope, which he deposited in his pocket.

"What have I written?" Olga cried, bewildered.

"The last letter," Millar replied, with a smile of triumph. "I will deliver it to Karl," he said.

Olga passed her hands wearily over her eyes, and struggled to clear her mind of the strange, intricate network of intrigue, insinuation and suggestion which Millar had woven there. She thought she was rid of his sinister influence until her fingers wrote, in obedience to his will, the letter which she would have given anything to have left unwritten.

When she looked up, Millar was putting the letter in his pocket, and his face wore the evil, cynical smile.

"I wrote it, yet I am ashamed of what I have written," she faltered, speaking with difficulty. "I tried to resist—yes, I did—but my hands, my pen, followed your words. You are a very strange man."

"I will deliver the letter to Karl," Millar repeated slowly.

"You know I did not mean it; you know I did not want to write it," Olga said.

"A woman does not always write what she wants," Millar said lightly, "but she always wants what she writes."

"The letter was not for him; it was for me," Olga insisted.

She arose and her hand was extended imploringly, begging Millar to return the missive to her, when Herman entered. The house had grown still. The music was hushed, the guests were gone. Only Millar, spirit of evil, incarnation of the devil, remained.

"This is good of you, to stay behind and entertain the hostess," Herman said cordially.

"Madam Hofmann's conversation has been so entertaining that I quite forgot the time," Millar said, looking at his watch. "By Jove! it is late; I must go immediately."

"Won't you have some cognac before you go out? The night is cold," Herman urged.

"No, I thank you; I have an important engagement in the morning, and it is now too late. Madam, I must bid you good-night. I have really spent a very pleasant evening."

Millar started toward the door. Olga uttered a half-suppressed cry, and he turned inquiringly.

"I left a letter lying here on the table; did you, perhaps, pick it up?" she asked nervously.

She was almost weeping and spoke in a half-hysterical tone. Millar, without changing countenance, drew the letter from his pocket.

"Perhaps this is it," he said, holding it up. "If it is of interest to your husband——"

He made a movement as if to hand it to Herman. Fear clutched at Olga's heart and she cried quickly:

"No, no, it was not that; it was nothing."

She forced herself to laugh. Millar bowed with impressive politeness and left the room. Herman bowed the strange guest out, and then noticed for the first time Olga's weariness and distress.

"You look tired, dear," he said tenderly. "It has been a long evening."

"Yes, I am tired," she said sadly.

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright. As she stood leaning against the table Herman thought her prettier than he had ever seen her before. He went up to her, took her hands in his and kissed her.

"You seem excited, too," he said. "It makes you prettier, and I like it, my dear, sweet, darling wife."

Olga shrank from his caress so obviously that Herman was hurt. She withdrew her hands.

"Please don't," she said. "I am awfully nervous."

"Your cheeks are burning, dear," he said, touching them.

"Don't, Herman; I wish to be alone for a few minutes; to rest all alone. Please leave me here."

"Very well, it shall be as you wish," Herman replied, adding as he left the room:

"But it would be better if you went to sleep."

A servant entered, and Olga signed to him to extinguish the lights. In a few moments she was alone, in semi-darkness, the room being partially lighted by the reflected light from the garden lamps. As she sat there, the tall, sinister figure of Millar, in his fur overcoat and his top hat, passed the window.

"It would be better if I went to sleep," Olga repeated to herself slowly.

Just then the shadow of Millar, as he passed in front of one of the garden lamps, was thrown against the white wall of the room, and she could hear distinctly his cynical chuckle. With a cry of horror she raised herself to her full height, put out her hands to ward off the evil spell, and shrieked:

"No! no! no!"

Then she sank fainting on the floor. For a moment the shadow lingered above her, and faded.

When Karl left the home of Herman and Olga to conduct Elsa and her aunt to their carriage he did not return. He was deeply ashamed of the suspicion he had entertained, and humiliated at the trick played upon his overheated imagination by Millar. He could not bear to face Olga or his tormentor.

Sending the servant back for his overcoat and hat, he plunged along through the snow, walking briskly. Old Heinrich had gone to bed when he reached the studio. There remained but a few

hours of the night, but Karl could not bring himself to sleep. He paced restlessly up and down the studio, his mind tortured by the thoughts so skilfully implanted there by Millar.

He was not surprised when the door bell rang and it was Millar whom he admitted. His strange visitor shook the snow from his great fur coat and laid it aside. Then he walked over to the grate where the fire burned cheerfully and stood in front of it, rubbing his hands as he held them out to the blaze.

Karl resumed his restless march up and down the room. Millar watched him cynically for a few moments.

"You seem nervous this morning, Karl," he said.

"I am nervous; I'm crazy," Karl answered.

"You ought to be very happy," Millar insinuated.

"Ought to be happy! I ought to be miserable—as I am, but it is all through your evil machinations. You have made me reveal all that is evil in me to the woman——"

"To the woman you love?"

"Yes, to the woman I love and have no right to love; to the woman whose honor I have held sacred for six years; to the woman I must never see again."

"You will see her again," Millar asserted quietly.

"How base she must think me," Karl went on wildly. "I did not know myself; I did not dream that I could be so rotten."

"You will see her again," Millar repeated. "She will come to you of her own free will here, in this very studio, to-day, and she will tell you with her lips on yours that she loves you."

"Stop! I won't listen to your infernal insinuations. You have ruined my happiness; you shall not ruin hers. I want you to keep out of her way. Do you understand? I give you fair warning."

"My dear Karl, you don't know what you are saying. I shall not mar her happiness or yours."

"Why did you play that evil trick on me to-night?"

"Why, you dull, young artist? Because I wanted to show her that you loved her; that you cared not two straws for that little slip of a girl to whom you were trying to play devoted. Because I wanted to show her that her great love is not wasted on an empty-pated ass."

"Her love!"

"Of course. Her love. She loves you, and has loved you for six years, and you were blind and did not know it."

"It is not true. It must not be so. She is a true, loyal wife to my friend."

"Bah! Do you want her to be loyal to that big boor of a husband when she loves you?"

"I refuse to listen to you any further. Now, let me tell you this. I am going away. I shall not see Olga again. I shall close my studio and return to Paris. And I wish not to see you again. Do you understand? I am going to bed now. When I awake I want you to be gone. Don't let me find you here."

"You are not hospitable, my dear young friend," Millar said, smiling and bowing. He seemed genuinely amused at the passionate outburst of the young artist.

"I believe you are the devil!" Karl cried.

"And you don't find the devil a pleasing personage to look upon, except when he is decked out by poets in the disguise of Cupid," Millar sneered.

Karl abruptly left the room, going into his own room and locking the door. He threw himself upon the bed and tried to sleep, but for hours he lay awake, haunted by the sinister shadow of his temptation.

Left alone, Millar sank comfortably back in the big, Gothic arm-chair before the fire. The red glow of the flames seemed to absorb him. He was merged in the shadows—light and shadow, as they played around the big chair, from whence there came his devilish chuckle.

Olga's maid, alarmed at the prolonged absence of her mistress, found her moaning on the floor, where she had fallen in a swoon after Millar's departure. The maid helped her mistress to her room and to bed.

"As soon as it is daylight go to Monsieur Karl's studio and find out at what time he will arise. Let no one else know that you go there. And awaken me as soon as it is possible for me to see him."

"Yes, madam."

Olga meant to get to Karl to intercept the letter which Millar had tricked her into writing. She meant to tell him to go away; to end everything between them. But, although she did not know it, she was blindly obeying the evil will of Millar.

Broad, glaring daylight had come when Heinrich entered the reception-room of the studio. He divined no presence. There were no conflicting passions in his old heart. He potted about, humming an old song to himself, dusting the vases and paintings, stirring the slumbering fire, until the door bell rang.

He admitted to the anteroom a beautiful young woman whom he had never seen before. When he returned to the reception-room to ruminate on the situation he was confronted by the figure of Millar—the figure of the devil.

"I—I beg your pardon; I did not know you were here," he said.

"I am here," Millar responded cheerfully. "Who rang?"

"A lady, sir."

"A real lady?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"That's odd. What does she want?"

"She wants to see my master, sir, Mr. Karl."

Heinrich hurried out and ushered in Elsa. The poor little girl had lost her bravado of the night before. She was ready to humble herself. She was stricken with the terrible malady. She was in love; she acknowledged it to herself, and she knew that the man she loved had his heart elsewhere. But she had resolved to make a fight—to win him if she could, and she had taken this desperate move.

She was startled, though, when she was ushered into the reception-room and saw Millar there, his hands on his breast, bowing profoundly.

"You seem to be everywhere," she exclaimed. "What are you doing here? Are you Karl's secretary?"

Millar was transformed back into his frock coat, his immaculate trousers, his wine-colored waistcoat. He was again the polished, suave, affable gentleman of the afternoon, with ingratiating manner, cynical smile and insinuating words.

"No, I am not Karl's servant; only his friend," he said. "How are you feeling to-day?"

"Oh, very well, thank you. I did not know there was any one in here or I should have waited outside. But as it is only you I do not mind."

She resented the presence of this man in the place, and she took a seat, turning her back to him. Millar, not in the least disturbed, said:

"Karl got in very late this morning."

"I assume that he did; it was very late when the ball ended."

"Still, I think he would be very much pleased to know that you are here. Will you permit me to acquaint him of the pleasure that awaits him?"

"Thank you, no; I will wait for him here. This is an interesting room. I have never been here before."

"I know that," Millar said.

"How do you know it?" Elsa demanded with spirit.

"Oh, Heinrich told me. A lady may come here secretly every day, but when she comes the first time it cannot be secret, even to Heinrich."

"I wish I had not come alone," Elsa declared.

"I know that also," said the imperturbable Millar.

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, Heinrich told me there was a real lady waiting."

"I am glad at least that Heinrich recognized me as such," Elsa declared indignantly. "He is the only one who has spoken to me as if he realized that."

"Then he must have thought you the other kind," Millar said cynically. "Heinrich made a mistake."

"I think Heinrich is the better judge," Elsa said.

"An excellent judge, I grant you," Millar said, laughing. "He is the one man who should have brought you here. You know only two men have the right to open the door of a bachelor

apartment to a young lady. They are his valet and the clergyman. You may choose which of the two you would prefer."

Elsa turned on him with eyes that flashed indignation.

"I was once left alone with a man who kissed me, and I insulted him," she said.

"I was once alone with a lady who insulted me and I kissed her," the cynical person replied.

"You are horrible!" Elsa exclaimed.

Millar saw her distress and rang the bell. When Heinrich entered he said:

"Get a little red leather pocketbook out of my overcoat."

"Oh, you need not fear; I shall not cry this morning," Elsa said.

"I am not apprehensive, but I thought you were laughing," Millar said. "When girls laugh I fear they are going to cry. Why did you come here?"

"I want to have my portrait painted, and I shall come every day," Elsa replied.

"You mean you want to come every day, and therefore you will have to have your portrait painted," said the cynic.

"You are an expert word juggler," said Elsa.

"Do you know that another lady comes here to have her portrait painted?"

"Yes; that is why I am coming," Elsa declared boldly. "I want to see whose portrait will be better."

"That is a bold challenge, my little girl; you were not so brave yesterday."

"Yesterday I was undecided. To-day I have made up my mind to fight. You gave me good advice."

"I have some more advice to give you to-day; we did not finish last night."

"What is it?"

"It is this. Do not fight. You were not made to fight."

"Why not? I am courageous."

"Yes, you are courageous, but you are not strong. Don't fight, because you will batter yourself against an impenetrable wall and suffer defeat. Do you know where Karl's heart is?"

"No."

"Then let me tell you. He loves Olga. He cannot love any one else. He has no room in his heart for any other image. Do not make sorrow for yourself, my child. Forget. Go away. Karl is the man for another woman."

Elsa was courageous. She had set aside her conventional training and ideas when she came to the studio to see Karl—to fight for him. Now she resolved that Millar should not defeat her again. She looked at him squarely and said:

"In spite of all that you tell me, I shall not give up."

In spite of her resolve to fight she was on the verge of tears. She sat at a table, shrinking from the sinister figure before her. Millar inspired her with a nameless terror, and it was almost against her will that she listened.

"Let me tell you what you must do," he said, sitting down in front of her. "Do you know what you should do?"

"I don't like to have you sit in judgment on me this way," she protested. "You question me as if you were a judge."

"No, it is not that, but you answer as if you were a prisoner. Now, little Elsa, stand up and listen. You know that Karl is in love with Olga."

"Yes, I know it; it is the only thing I do know."

"Then you should give Karl up."

"I can't give him up."

"You must learn."

"How? From whom shall I learn?"

"Let me see; I think I have here the very person," Millar said.

He walked over and opened the hall door.

"Mimi, come in here and wait; it is warmer," he called.

CHAPTER XI

To the amazement of Elsa, the shrinking little model came in, hesitating on the threshold. She wore a red woolen jersey over her bodice that fitted her tightly and made her look very slight and shivering. She looked with wide-open eyes at the beautiful girl and dropped a courtesy as she sat in the seat Millar drew out for her. Elsa nodded at her in silence, and Millar, after watching them a few seconds with a smile of amusement, walked out of the room, whistling softly. Mimi was the first to break the silence, squirming under Elsa's direct scrutiny.

"Madam is waiting for the artist?"

"Yes," Elsa replied shortly.

"So am I," Mimi said, adding, with engaging frankness:

"He went on a spree last night. When he does that he always sleeps late."

Elsa was embarrassed, and there was another interval of silence. Then Mimi said:

"Is madam to have her portrait painted?"

"Yes."

"I know all those who come here to be painted," Mimi went on. "This is quite like home to me. I am his model. I don't have to pay for my portraits. Madam has a splendid profile."

"Please do not call me madam," Elsa said impatiently. "I am miss, like yourself."

"I beg your pardon," Mimi said. "I am not madam, either. My name is Mimi."

"My name is Elsa."

"Oh, I know; I have heard of you. You are very rich as well as very beautiful. I know what it means to be rich. Once our family was well off, and I did not have to work as a model."

"I am sorry you have been unfortunate," Elsa said.

"But I have heard much of you," the girl went on. She was now tremendously interested in this beautiful woman whose coming, she believed, meant that she would no longer be Karl's model. "You see, I know all the things that go on here; I look out for the artist's laundry and sew his buttons on; and I almost know his thoughts."

"And do they interest you?"

"Oh, yes; but it will not be so any more."

"Why not?"

"Because he is to be married; because you have come and he will not need me."

"Why not? He will still paint. He must have models."

"Yes, but it will not be the same, and I will not come any more."

"Do you like Monsieur Karl?"

"Very much."

"Does he paint you now?"

"Ah, no; nothing but landscapes."

"Then you did not come as a model to-day?" Elsa asked.

"I come always as a model. If the artist does not treat me as such it is not my fault."

She noticed that Elsa looked offended, and went on hurriedly, apologetically:

"Please, if I offend you I will be quiet. But you seem to be so nice. If I were you and you were the model I should not be angry with you."

Elsa was touched by the pathos in Mimi's eyes.

"Pardon me; I am very, very sorry if I have hurt you," she cried impulsively. "Let us be friends."

"Yes, let's," Mimi cried. "You can talk to me about everything. I am not a bad sort, but I have known him for a long while. I was crying when I went away yesterday and he felt sorry for me. He came to the house on his way to the ball last night in his evening clothes, but I would not see him. It must be finished."

"Was he fond of you?"

"I liked him very much," Mimi replied simply.

"And now?"

"Ah, now it is different. If a man wants to have another sweetheart, what can we do? It is like the

railway. The train comes in and goes and the little station must wait until another train comes."

"And you are going to wait for another train? You were fond of him and can speak like that?"

"I was fond of him," Mimi said. "But I am not silly enough to believe it will last just because I wanted it to last. I knew when it started that I should have to give him up some day. I have learned that. I shall forget him—and hope that he and you will be happy."

Mimi's tears came unrestrainedly now, and as she looked for her handkerchief Elsa picked up Millar's weeping satchel, where he had left it on the table, and gave it to the model. Mimi dabbed vigorously at her streaming eyes.

"I am glad that I met you here," she said when she could control her voice. "I shall be clever to-day and not see him at all. I will go away now and never come back. What time is it?"

"It is 3 o'clock," Elsa said, looking at her watch.

"Then I must go. Another artist in the next block expects me to pose for him, and his laundress comes at 3. He is very clever."

She stood up and looked around the room at the things on the walls—her own pictures—the place that seemed like home to her. She sobbed as she started toward the door.

"Good-by, miss," she said.

Elsa looked after her as she went out. Then she looked around the room and was seized with panic.

"Mimi! Mimi!" she called out.

The model did not return. Elsa seized her hat and fled, just as Millar entered from the adjoining room. His chuckle of Satanic amusement reached her as she hurried from the house.

CHAPTER XII

Millar's sardonic face was wreathed in smiles as he looked after the two young girls, each of whom carried from his hateful presence a bruised heart.

With Mimi it was the fate of a child of the underworld—something to which she was pathetically resigned. With her there was no struggle. She knew that when she ceased to charm she must go her way and find another man; a master rather than a sweetheart.

Elsa could not have told herself what fear made her fly from the studio after Mimi, but she feared that she was also doomed to give up the hope of her heart. It was her first cruel disappointment, but Mimi had made her see that she was beaten, and, in spite of her earlier resolution to fight, she saw that fighting would bring only unhappiness. She hurried to her waiting carriage and was driven home, where she locked herself in her room to weep alone.

And Millar, the sinister being, ever at hand with his insidiously evil suggestions, chuckled as he watched them go. He threw himself into a chair and rang the bell for Heinrich. The old servant entered rebelliously, but, trained to habits of obedience, he could not give expression to his feeling of hatred and distrust of his master's strange visitor. As for Millar, he even seemed to find something amusing in the old man's obvious aversion.

"Bring me tea and brandy," he ordered peremptorily.

"Yes, sir."

"Is your master up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has any one seen him this morning?"

"No, sir. Madam Hofmann's maid was here three times."

"What for?" Millar demanded quickly.

"She wished to know when Madam Hofmann might see Mr. Karl. I told her I had strict orders not to call him before 3 o'clock."

Millar looked at his watch and saw that it was a few minutes after 3 o'clock.

"Humph! We shall have another visitor shortly," he muttered. "I think I begin to see the completion of my work. It shall be this afternoon. Get my tea," he added to Heinrich, "and serve it in the studio."

The old man went out. Millar paced slowly up and down the floor, looking at his watch, until he heard the door bell ring.

"The beautiful Olga," he said, stepping softly from the reception-room into the studio and leaving

the way clear for Olga.

She was admitted by Heinrich. She hurried into the room, looked wildly about her and sank into a seat. For a moment she could not speak.

All night and all day, since Millar's shadow hovered above her fainting form in her own home, she had been torn by the emotions raised by the letter. It was a confession she had never meant to make. She dreaded the thought of Karl ever seeing it. Heinrich waited respectfully.

"Is Mr. Karl at home?" she asked.

"Yes, madam."

"My maid told me he could not be seen until 3 o'clock. It is now after 3. May I see him?"

"If you will wait a few minutes longer, madam, I will tell him that you are here."

Heinrich started toward the studio.

"One moment," Olga called after him. "Has any one seen Mr. Karl to-day?"

"No, madam."

"Has he received no letter?"

"No, madam."

"Thank God!" she exclaimed fervently. "Go, Heinrich; tell him I am in a great hurry and must see him at once."

"I am afraid, madam, you will have to wait a few minutes for Mr. Karl to dress," Heinrich said. "Shall I tell Dr. Millar you are here?"

"Who?" Olga cried, springing up in dread.

"Dr. Millar; the gentleman who was here yesterday," Heinrich said.

"Is he with your master?" Olga cried in fright.

"Yes, madam."

"Oh, God! am I too late? Tell me, did you see Dr. Millar give a letter to your master?"

"He may have done so, madam. I cannot remember."

Olga walked nervously up and down the room, while Heinrich waited, sympathizing at her distress. The old man was mystified, but he felt that Millar was to blame for the grief which his young master's beautiful visitor showed.

"It may not be too late," Olga cried to herself. Then she said to Heinrich:

"Please tell Dr. Millar to come down. Do not tell him who is here; simply say a lady wishes to see him at once."

"Yes, madam."

Heinrich withdrew, leaving Olga, with clenched hands and twitching features, walking up and down the room. It was thus Millar saw her as he entered, with his cynical smile, at which she shuddered.

"You are the lady who wished to see me at once?" he asked, with his most polite bow. "I am honored, madam."

"Yes, I sent for you," Olga said, not knowing how to begin.

"And what may I do for you?"

"Please tell me quickly—I am trembling—did you——"

"Yes, dear lady, I delivered your letter."

Olga sank into her chair and covered her face with her hands, while dry, tearless sobs shook her body. Millar looked at her unmoved, and as Heinrich entered with the tea tray he turned coolly to the old servant.

"Put that tea here," he said, indicating a table near Olga. "And the brandy. Thank you. You may go."

He poured himself a cup of tea and began to sip it, looking the while at the terrified woman before him.

CHAPTER XIII

It was the moment of Millar's complete triumph, and he gloated over Olga as she sat there, her trembling hands covering her face, much as a large cat gloats over a mouse, helpless beneath his paws. He lied deliberately about the letter, which even then reposed in the inside pocket of his immaculate frock coat. But he reserved it for a final coup. He knew that Olga, believing Karl was in possession of the letter, would yield to the inevitable; that she would again confess her love, even to Karl himself, and that only a miracle of resolution and faith and strength could save the two young people from the abyss of dishonor and unhappiness into which he was about to plunge them.

He sipped his tea in silence. Several moments elapsed before Olga was able to control herself. Then she asked, without looking at Millar, and her voice was dry with pain:

"Did—did Karl read the letter?"

"Oh, yes," Millar said, with another sip of tea.

"Oh, God! too late!" she cried.

Millar arose and stood behind Olga's chair, leaning over her and speaking in a soft, low voice.

"After he read the letter he buried his face in his pillow and wept," he said.

"He wept?"

"Yes; he wept with joy. I do not like men who weep."

Olga did not heed his flippancy. She looked up at him imploringly.

"I did not want him to get that letter," she said. "I came to ask him to give it back to me unopened. I am too late."

"It is not you who are too late; it was I who was too early," Millar said deprecatingly.

"Oh, is this life really a serious matter?" Olga exclaimed; "when everything can depend upon one's getting here a few moments before or a few minutes after 3 o'clock?"

"That is it exactly," Millar said. "We should not take it so seriously."

Olga looked thoughtfully away from him and said to herself softly:

"He wept."

"From joy," Millar repeated after her, in the same soft voice.

"I am afraid to speak to him, and yet I must," Olga cried, starting up. "I would like to go far, far away, but I cannot. Something seems to hold me here. I cannot, cannot go. What will become of me?"

"You will be very happy and will make Karl very happy," Millar said.

Heinrich entered and took the tea-things.

"Mr. Karl will be down in a moment," he said.

Olga clasped her hands tragically and turned an imploring face on Millar, who started for the studio door.

"Good-by," he said. "I will leave you to speak to Karl alone."

"Please don't go," Olga implored.

"I can hardly remain under the circumstances," he said.

He knew that to further his design Karl and Olga should meet quite alone. He would see to it that even old Heinrich did not interrupt them until Olga had repeated her confession of love, and the hoax of the letter had been revealed. Then he would reappear, with the letter, and they might read it together.

Olga knew that her own frail, feminine heart would give way if she were left alone to meet Karl. Evil as she believed Millar to be, yet she dreaded his going now.

"I am afraid to be alone with him," she said. "Won't you please stay?"

"But if I stay, how could you speak to Karl about the letter?" Millar asked. "And you must say something about it, you know. I would only be in the way."

Olga weakened and began to pace the floor again.

"Well, I shall be quite frank with him," she said. "I shall be honest. I shall ask him for the last time ___"

Karl's voice was heard in his own room, calling to Heinrich.

"He is coming," Millar said. "I will leave you."

"Please don't go very far away," Olga implored.

"I shall be here," Millar said, going to a small anteroom adjoining the studio. "If you need me, call."

He stepped within the other room and closed the door softly. Olga stood, her hands gripping the back of her chair, waiting.

Karl entered the reception-room and stood for an instant looking at Olga. He showed that he, too, had suffered during the night. His face was white and drawn. When he saw Olga standing there, a mute statue of despair, he was filled with pity for her and self-abasement. He stepped quickly to her side, caught her hands and kissed them passionately.

"I ought to go down on my knees and beg your pardon for my conduct last night, Olga," he said.

She turned to him quickly, yielding her hands to him, leaning toward him, speaking eagerly.

"Speak very low; he is in there," she said, pointing to the anteroom where Millar was hiding. "Let us be brief, Karl. I have been very foolish, but I could not control myself. After what happened I wanted to know. I wanted to feel that you loved me as I thought you did, as I hoped you did, day and night, every minute."

"Olga!" he exclaimed rapturously.



"I WANTED TO FEEL THAT YOU LOVED ME AS I HOPED YOU DID."—

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He was not prepared for this. He feared that he had offended her, and her impulsive declaration swept him from his feet. He watched her face eagerly, hungrily, as she went on, talking very rapidly, and making no effort to disengage her hands, which he held clasped to his breast.

"Everything has changed since yesterday, Karl. But let us try to repeat what we said then. Let us shake hands honorably. Let us try to be strong and keep our promises, as we have kept them so long, Karl. If I have been bold and frivolous it was only because I wanted to know what you thought of me; nothing else. But I am afraid I have been punished too much."

Her passion swept her along, as she was swayed alternately by love for Karl and the saner impulse to flee from him. But the sweetness of knowing that she was loved, of feeling her hands clasped in his, after all her years of self-depression, broke down her resolution.

"I fear it is too late, Karl. My strength is gone. My will is lost. We have gone back six years. Karl, I love you."

CHAPTER XIV

The last words she whispered with infinite tenderness, and her head fell on his breast. Hysterically they clasped each other in their arms and, half laughing, half sobbing, looked into each other's eyes. Karl leaned over her, murmuring his love and kissing her eyes and hair.

"Be careful; he is in there," Olga warned him finally, again pointing at the door behind which

their evil spirit lurked. Then she whispered shyly:

"Did my letter surprise you?"

"Letter?" Karl asked, astonished. "What letter, dear heart?"

"Karl, I understand you wish to be discreet," Olga said reproachfully, "but it is my first letter and I am not ashamed. Let us be honest; I am not afraid. I love you. When I wrote that letter I hardly knew what I was doing, and I must confess I felt ashamed at first. But I am no longer ashamed now; I am proud. Sometimes women do not write what they want, Karl, but they always want what they write. Karl, I would like to read that letter over again in your arms."

That letter meant much to Olga; it was her only love letter. She had never written to Karl before, except in the conventional boy and girl fashion, when she did not know how to express love. Her correspondence with Herman had always been of the most perfunctory sort. Never before had she poured out her soul as she did in this letter. Now she wanted to see what she had written; to read it over with the man for whom it was intended.

It was with a shock of pain that she beheld Karl's indifference, and she was amazed when he added:

"I received no letter from you, Olga."

"What! how can you say so? Was not a letter delivered to you this morning?"

"I assure you that I did not receive any letter from you," Karl said earnestly.

The realization of Millar's trick was like a blow in the face to Olga. She saw now how he had deliberately lied to her, in order that she would certainly repeat her confession of love to Karl. In what a bold, forward, disloyal attitude she had been placed! Her first impulse was of anger, and she ran toward the anteroom.

"Doctor! Dr. Millar!" she called wildly.

The door opened noiselessly and Millar stood bowing on the threshold.

"My—my letter!" Olga stammered.

"Madam, I beg a thousand pardons," Millar said suavely. "My only excuse is that some letters are better undelivered."

He drew from the inner pocket of his coat a letter, and with a smile and a sweeping bow handed it to Karl.

"However, I can now make reparation," he said.

Karl took the letter, looking wonderingly from Olga to Millar. He held it an instant in his hand and was about to open it, when Olga cried:

"Karl, tear the letter up."

Karl instantly obeyed her, tearing the envelope into small pieces.

"Now burn it," Olga said.

He stepped over to the fireplace and threw the bits of paper on the glowing coals. They started up in a little flame and were quickly reduced to ashes.

Olga was terrified at the trick Millar had played upon her and at its results. She looked in fear from him to Karl.

"Who is this man?" she asked.

Karl could not answer her. The same question was echoing in his heart.

Who was this man, this personification of evil? Ever there were his insidious wiles to compromise, cajole, trick and betray them. He could not tell. He only knew that he loathed him and that he would drive him out.

"Are you going now?" he demanded, as Millar stood looking at them with his evil smile.

Millar took the question in the most natural way, disregarding the purposely offensive tone in which Karl spoke.

"Yes, I am; I must," he said, half regretfully. "My train leaves in half an hour. Again permit me to beg a thousand pardons. Could I have foreseen the anguish that was to follow my failure to deliver madam's letter, nothing in the world could have——"

Karl interrupted him rudely, determined that he should not beguile them again and that he should not speak of Olga or the letter as a thing of importance.

"You should know that the letter contained only a conventional message," he said.

Millar looked at Olga, and his smile grew broad as she hung her head and blushed. Who should know better than he the confession which she had written and which was now destroyed?

"It was quite conventional, I am sure," he said cynically.

"You will miss your train," Karl said with studied insolence. "Heinrich, help the doctor on with his coat."

"A thousand thanks," the imperturbable Millar said. "Madam, good-by. And once more I beg a thousand pardons."

Neither Olga nor Karl spoke to him as he walked to the door, looked back at them, bowed low again and chuckled as the door closed after him.

Olga turned quickly to Karl and held out her hands.

"He is gone. I am glad. But, Karl, I would have given a year of my life if he had delivered my letter to you."

"Why? Tell me what you wrote," he asked eagerly.

"I wrote all the things I told you a few moments ago, Karl. You know it all now."

She went over to the grate and looked sadly into the ashes.

"My first love letter," she said softly. "Oh, Karl, it was my confession of my love for you. I would like to read it over again with you, and then we might forget. I don't want to be afraid. I want to be strong, to be happy. If I only had that letter now."

Karl took her hands in his, and comforted her.

"Never mind it, Olga; it has served its purpose. It has taught us ourselves, our hearts."

"It has taught us that we must be strong, brave and loyal," Olga declared warmly.

They stood thus, looking into each other's eyes, sanely, clearly, each ready to renounce. The door of the studio opened and Millar stood before them again, holding in his extended hand a letter.

"I beg a thousand pardons again," he said. "I find I gave Karl an old tailor's bill instead of madam's letter."

Olga eagerly took the letter, opened it and recognized her own handwriting.

"My letter, Karl!" she exclaimed.

Both bent close over the letter, reading it eagerly, while Millar slipped quietly out of the studio—out of their lives. Olga looked up from their reading.

"I am glad that I wrote it, Karl," she said. "Now we will burn it."

Together they watched it glow brightly into flame and fall into gray ashes.

"That is our love begun and ended, Karl," Olga said quietly. "It was wrong, and now we realize it, don't we? And now, dear boy, you are coming with me."

"Where?" Karl asked.

"I am going to take you to Elsa," Olga answered.

With a feeling of elation, Karl called Heinrich, and was helped into his overcoat. He bent respectfully and kissed Olga's hand as they walked out of the studio together.

THE END

THE MORAL OF "THE DEVIL"

BY ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

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In every human organization dwell the *Twins*—the Angel and the Demon.

The Angel is the real self; the enduring, immortal self, which goes on from life to life, from planet to planet, until it has made the circuit and ended where it began—at the *Source*.

The Demon is man made; it belongs to the changing, perishable bodies which are created anew with each incarnation; and it goes down, and out, into nothingness, with the disintegration of the animal body.

But with each new body, the mortal being usually invents, or adopts, a new Devil.

A few great souls have passed along through earth without such demoniacal association; Christ, the latest and greatest of the Masters, held converse with the Devil once, on the mountain top,

when He was tempted; but that was His only acquaintance with him, because He had finished His circuit, and was ready to become *one with God*.

A weak man or woman, with good intentions and desirous of leading a moral life, but lacking *will power*, and inclined to be timid, and fearful, and negative in thought, often adopts a Devil formed by some selfish and licentious person, who fashions Devils by the wholesale and sends them out to roam over the earth, seeking an open door in a weak mind.

When such occurrences are analyzed they are usually called hypnotism.

In every liquor saloon, in every gambling den, in every boldly vicious and immoral place, about every race track and pool room, Devils swarm. And the weak, the dissipated, the thoughtless and the irresponsible minds are the open doors for them to mass through, into dominion of the human citadel.

In many drawing-rooms of fashion, in brilliant restaurants and hotels, where the élite congregate; in sensuously decorated studios, Devils also wait day and night, knowing that they will be entertained, if not welcomed, by some of the self-indulgent frequenters of these places.

Many are the devices employed by the Devils of earth to bring about the desired results.

Drinks, drugs, avarice, money mania, jealousy, love of power, desire to outshine neighbors, lust, sensuality, gross appetites, gourmandism, love of praise, personal conceit and egotism, selfishness in every form—all these are webs which the Devils spin about humanity.

Even beautiful, romantic sentiment, memory and imagination, become aids of the Devil, at times, when coarser and more common methods fail in the snaring of a refined soul.

Many a good wife, who shrinks with horror at the thought of a vulgar amour, or of any act which could pain or anger her husband, has been led into the Devil's net by indulging in retrospective dreams of a vanished romance and through the stirring of old ashes to see if one little spark remained.

Letter writing is a favorite pastime of almost all Devils. Once they get a romantic man or woman, with a pen in hand and an unoccupied chamber in the heart, and the breed of Devils who hang about the domestic hearth, hoping to find rooms to let, chuckle in glee.

Wives who have believed themselves happy and satisfied, husbands who have been unconscious of any lack in their lives, have fallen by the wayside through an interesting correspondence with some sympathetic "affinity," who was Devil-instructed to lead them into trouble.

After a man or woman falls into the Devil's snare they both call it Fate, and proclaim their inability to combat the powerful influence of "destiny."

But destiny is *man himself*.

The Angel dwells always within him, ready to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan," if the man really wants it said.

The Angel and the Devil both are completely under man's control; the work of man, here in this sphere and in every other, is to develop the *character which will enable him to get back to the Source*.

Unless the man directs the Angel to take the ascendancy, there would be no growth in wisdom for him were the Angel to interpose. So he remains silent and lets the Devil do his work, in order that man may find out for himself the pain and folly of such dominion; and in order that when he again encounters the Devil, either in this plane of existence or some other, he may be able to say as Christ said, "Get thee behind me."

Always have there been Devils; always will there be Devils, while humanity is evolving from the lower to the higher states.

But always is there the Angel, ready to lead the soul to conquest and victory if the soul will call.

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[Transcriber's Note: A table of contents has been created for this electronic book. In addition, the following typographical errors from the original edition have been corrected.

In Chapter III, a triple quotation mark following "You were not here when I entered" and a single quotation mark preceding "Your future wife will swear" were changed to double quotation marks, and "sip the sweetest wine" was changed to "sip the sweetest wine".

In Chapter VI, a quotation mark was added following "a found treasure".

In Chapter VIII, "the fulfilment of her puropse" was changed to "the fulfilment of her purpose", and "every detal of his dress" was changed to "every detail of his dress".

In Chapter IX, quotation marks were removed in front of "Don't you want to speak to her?" and ""With a wild cry", "the indignation of the yung artist" was changed to "the indignation of the young artist", and "He advanced determedly" was changed to "He advanced determinedly".

In the advertisements, a comma following "Boston Transcript" was changed to a period, "dominant personalties" was changed to "dominant personalities", and "Medalion in color" was changed to "Medallion in color".

No other corrections were made to the text.]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DEVIL: A TRAGEDY OF THE HEART AND CONSCIENCE ***

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