---THE----

Masquerader

By KATHERINE CECIL THURSTON, Author of "The Circle," Etc.

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couldn't go on."

checked it.

"The bell?"

face to affright him.

Loder swallowed his whisky slowly.

His sense of overpowering curiosity

held him very still, but he made no

Again Chilcote shifted his position

agitatedly. "It had to be done," he

said disjointedly. "I had to do it-then

and there. The things were on the bu-

reau-the pens and ink and telegraph

Loder laid down his glass suddenly.

An exclamation rose to his lips, but he

At the slight sound of the tumbler

touching the table Chilcote turned, but

there was no expression on the other's

"They tempted me," he repeated has-

tily. "They seemed like magnets; they

sat at the bureau staring at them for a

seized me-something you could never

understand-and I caught up the near-

est pen and wrote just what was in my

mind. It wasn't a telegram, properly

sage seemed to steady me; the mere

forming of the words quieted my mind.

I was almost cool when I got up from

"Yes. I rang for a servant. I had

to send the wire myself, so I had to

get a cab." His voice rose to irrita-

bility. "I pressed the bell several

times, but the thing had gone wrong;

'twouldn't work. At last I gave it up

and went into the corridor to call some

"Well?" In the intense suspense of

"Oh, I went out of the room, but

there at the door, before I could call

anybody, I knocked up against that

idiot Greening. He was looking for me

-for you, rather-about some beastly

Wark affair. I tried to explain that I

wasn't in a state for business. I tried

to shake him off, but he was worse

than Blessington! At last, to be rid of

the fellow, I went with him to the

"But the telegram?" Loder began.

Then again he checked himself. "Yes-

"I'm getting to the telegram! I wish

you wouldn't jar me with sudden ques-

tions. I wasn't in the study more than

a minute more than five or six min-

ntes"- His voice became confused, the

strain of the connected recital was tell-

ing upon him. With nervous haste he

made a rush for the end of his story.

"I wasn't more than seven or eight

"Loder, what are you going to do?"

minutes in the study; then, as I came

downstairs Crapham met me in the

hall. He told me that Lillian Astrupp

had called and wished to see me and

that he had shown her into the morn-

"The morning room?" Loder sudden-

ly stepped back from the table. "The

morning room? With your telegram

His sudden speech and movement

startled Chilcote. The blood rushed to

his face, then died out, leaving it ashen.

"Don't do that, Loder!" he cried. "I-I

With an immense effort Loder con-

"I'm going on. I tell you I'm going

on! I got a horrid shock when Crap-

ham told me. Your story came clatter-

had come to see you. I knew there was

"But the telegram! The telegram!"

Chilcote naid no heed to the interrup-

ing room"-

can't bear it!"

lying on the bureau?"

going to be a scene"-

yes-I understand," he added quietly.

the moment the word escaped Loder.

the bureau and pressed the bell"-

speaking. It was more a letter.

seemed to draw me toward them.

effort to prompt his companion.

forms. They tempted me."

"Well?" he said again in a gentler | me-that I knew I couldn't stand it-

Chilcote had walked to the table and laid down his hat. His face was white and the muscles of his lips twitched nervously as he drew off his gloves. "Thank heaven, you're here!" he said shortly. "Give me something to drink."

In silence Loder brought out the whisky and set it on the table; then instinctively he turned aside. As plainly as though he saw the action he mentally figured Chilcote's furtive glance, the furtive movement of his fingers to his waistcoat pocket, the hasty dropping of the tabloids into the glass. For an instant the sense of his tacit connivance came to him sharply; the next, he flung it from him. The human, inner voice was whispering its old watchword. The strong man has no time to waste over his weaker

When he heard Chilcote lay down his | long time. Then a terrible compulsion tumbler he looked back again, "Well, what is it?" he said. "What have you come for?" He strove resolutely to keep his voice severe but, try as he might, he could not quite subdue the eager force that lay behind his words. Once again, as on the night of their | myself plain. The writing of the messecond interchange, life had become a phoentz, rising to fresh existence even while he sifted its ashes. "Well?" he said once again.

Chilcote had set down his glass. He was nervously passing his handkerchief across his lips. There was something in the gesture that attracted Loder. Looking at him more attentively, he saw what his own feelings and the other's conventional dress had blinded him to-the almost piteous panic and excitement in his visitor's eyes. "Something's gone wrong!" he said,

with abrupt intuition. Chilcote started. "Yes-no-that is,

yes," he stammered. Loder moved around the table. "Something's gone wrong," he repeat-

ed, "and you've come to tell me." The tone unnerved Chilcote. He suddenly dropped into a chair. "It-it wasn't my fault!" he began. "I-I have had a horrible time!"

Loder's lips tightened. "Yes," he said, "yes, I understand." The other glanced up with a gleam of his old suspicion. "'Twas all my

nerves, Loder'-"Of course. Yes, of course." Lo-

der's interruption was curt. Chilcote eyed him doubtfully. Then recollection took the place of doubt, and a change passed over his expres-

sion. "It wasn't my fault," he began hastily. "On my soul, 'It wasn't! It was Crapham's beastly fault for showing her into the morning room"-Loder kept silent. His curiosity had Mared into endden life at the other's words, but he feared to break the shat-

gered train of thought even by a word. In the silence Chilcote moved uneasily. "You see," he went on at last, "when I was here with you I-I felt strong. I-I"- He stopped. "Yes, yes. When you were here with me you felt strong."

"Yes, that's it. While I was here falt I could do the thing. But when I swent home-when I went up to my rooms"- Again he paused, passing his handkerchief across his forehead. "When you went up to your rooms?"

Loder strove hard to keep his centrol. by room!- Oh, I-I forget about that. I forget about the night"-He besitated confusedly, "All I remember is the coming down to breakfast next morning-this morning- at 12 o'diock"-

Loder turned to the table and poured mimself out some whisky. "Yes," he acquiesced in a very quiet voice. At the word Chilcote rose from his seat. Elia disquietude was very evident. "Oh, there was breakfast on the table when I came downstairs-breakfast, with flowers and a horrible, dazgling glare of sun. It was then, Loder, as I stood and looked into the room. that the impossibility of it all came to

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tion. He was following an are with of ideas. "I knew she had come to see you. I knew there was going to be a scene. When I got to the morning room my hand was shaking so that I could scarcely turn the handle; then, as the door opened, I could have cried out with relief. Eve was there as well!"

"Yes. I don't think I was ever so glad to see her in my life." He laughed almost hysterically. "I was quite civil to her, and she was-quite sweet to me"- Again he laughed. Loder's lips tightened.

"You see, it saved the situation Even if Lillian wanted to be nasty. she couldn't while Eve was there. We talked for about ten minutes. were quite an amiable trio. Then Lillian told me why she'd called. She wanted me to make a fourth in a theater party at the Arcadian tonight, and I-I was so pleased and so relieved that I said yes!" He paused and laughed again unsteadily.

In his tense anxiety Loder ground his heel into the floor. "Go on!" he sald fiercely. "Go on!" "Don't!" Chilcote exclaimed.

going on-I'm going on." He passed his handkerchief across his lips. "We taiked for ten minutes or so, and then Lillian left. I went with her to the hall door, but Crapham was there too -so I was still safe. She laughed and chatted and seemed in high spirits as we crossed the hall, and she was still smiling as she waved to me from her motor. But then, Loder-then, as I stood in the hall, it all came to me suddenly. I remembered that Lillian must have been alone in the morning room before Eve found her! I remembered the telegram! I ran back to the room, meaning to question Eve as to how long Lillian had been alone. but she had left the room. I ran to the bureau-but the telegram wasn't

"Gone?" "Yes, gone. That's why I've come

straight here." For a moment they confronted each other. Then, moved by a sudden impulse, Loder pushed Chilcote aside and crossed the room. An instant later the opening and shutting of doors, the hasty pulling out of drawers and moving of boxes came from the bed-

Chilcote, shaken and nervous, stood for a minute where his companion had left him. At last, impelled by curiosity, he too crossed the narrow passage wanted you back, and I had to make and entered the second room.

The full light streamed in through the open window; the keen spring air blew freshly across the housetops, and on the window sill a band of grimy, joyous sparrows twittered and preened themselves. In the middle of the room stood Loder. His coat was off, and round him on chairs and floor lay an array of waistcoats, gloves and ties. For a space Chilcote stood in the door-

way staring at him, then his lips parted and he took a step forward. "Loder," he said anxiously, "Loder, what are you going to do?"

Loder turned. His shoulders were stiff, his face alight with energy. "I'm going back," he said, "to unravel the tangle you have made."

CHAPTER XXVIII. ODER'S plan of action was arrived at before he reached Trafalgar square. The facts of the case were simple. Chilcote had left an incriminating telegram on the bureau in the morning room at Grosvenor square. By an unlucky chance Lillian Astrupp had been shown up into that room, where she had remained alone until the moment that Eve, either by request or by accident, had found her there. The facts resolved themselves into one question: glance. What use had Lillian made of those solitary moments? Without deviation, Loder's mind turned toward one answer. Lillian was not the woman to lose an epportunity, whether the space at her command was long or

So convinced was he that, reaching Trafalgar square, he stopped and hailed a hansom. "Cadogan gardens!" he called. "No.

The moments seemed very few before the cab drew up beside the curb and he caught his second glimpse of the enameled door with its silver fittings. Instantly he pressed the bell the door was opened by Lillian's discreet, deferential manservant. "Is Lady Astrupp at home?" he

The man looked thoughtful. "Her ladyship lunched at home, sir"- he began cautiously.

But Loder interrupted him. "Ask her to see me," he said laconically. The servant expressed no surprise. His only comment was to throw the

door wide. sir," he said, "I'll inform her ladyship."

"If you'll wait in the white room, Chilcote was evidently a frequent and a favored visitor. In this manner Loder for the second

time entered the house so unfamiliarand yet so familiar in all that it suggested. Entering the drawing room, he had leisure to look about him. It was a beautiful room, large and lofty. Luxury was evident on every hand, but it was not the luxury that palls or offends. Each object was graceful and possessed its own intrinsic value. The atmosphere was too effeminate to appeal to him, but he acknowledged the taste and artistic delicacy it conveyed. Almost at the moment of acknowledgment the door opened to admit Lillian. "I thought it would be you," she said

esigmatically. Loder came forward. "You expected me?" he said guardediy. A sudden conviction filled him that it was not the evidence of her eyes, but something at once subtler and more definite that

prompted her recognition of him. She smiled. "Why should I expect you? On the contrary, I'm waiting to Arcadian tonight!"

know why you're here?" He was silent for an instant. Then he answered in her own light tone. "As far as that goes," he said, "let's make it my duty call-having dined

with you. I'm an old fashioned per-

For a full second she surveyed him amusedly. Then at last she spoke. "My dear Jack"-she laid particular stress on the name-"I never imagined you punctilious. I should have thought bohemian would have been more the word."

Loder felt disconcerted and annoyed. Either, like himself, she was fishing for information or she was deliberately playing with him. In his perplexity he glanced across the room toward the

Lillian saw the look. "Won't you sit down?" she said, indicating the couch. "I promise not to make you smoke. I shan't even ask you to take off your

Loder made no movement, His mind was unpleasantly upset. It was nearly a fortnight since he had seen Lillian, and in the interval her attitude had changed, and the change puzzled him. It might mean the philosophy of a woman who, knowing herself without adequate weapons, withdraws from a combat that has proved fruitless, or it might imply the merely catlike desire to toy with a certainty. He looked quickly at the delicate face, the green eyes somewhat obliquely set, the unreliable mouth, and instantly he inclined to the latter theory. The conviction that she possessed the telegram filled him suddenly, and with it came the desire to put his belief to the test-to know beyond question whether her smiling unconcern meant malice or mere entertainment.

"When you first came into the room," he said quietly, "you said 'I thought it would be you.' Why did you say that? Again she smiled-the smile that might be malicious or might be merely amused. "Oh," she answered at last, "I only meant that though I had been told Jack Chilcote wanted me, it wasn't Jack Chilcote I expected to see!"

After her statement there was a pause. Loder's position was difficult. Instinctively convinced that, strong in the possession of her proof, she was enjoying his tantalized discomfort, he yet craved the actual evidence that should set his suspicions to rest. Acting upon the desire, he made a new beginning. "Do you know why I came?" he

asked. Lillian looked up innocently. "It's so hard to be certain of anything in this world," she said. "But one is always at liberty to guess."

Again he was perplexed. Her attitude was not quite the attitude of one who controls the game, and yet- He looked at her with a puzzled scrutiny. Women for him had always spelled the incomprehensible. He was at his best, his strongest, his surest, in the presence of men. Feeling his disadvantage, yet determined to gain his end, he made a last attempt. "How did you amuse yourself at

Grosvenor square this morning before Eve came to you?" he asked. The effort was awkwardly blunt, but it was Lillian was buttoning her glove. She

did not raise her head as he spoke, but her fingers paused in their task. For a second she remained motionless; then she looked up slowly. "Oh," she said sweetly, "so I was right in my guess? You did come to find out whether I sat in the morning

room with my hands in my lap or wandered about in search of entertain-Loder colored with annoyance and apprehension. Every look, every tone, of Lillian's was distasteful to him. No microscope could have revealed her

more fully to him than did his own eyesight. But it was not the moment for personal antipathles; there were other interests than his own at stake. With new resolution he returned her "Then I must still ask my first ques-

tion, Why did you say, 'I thought it would be you?" His gaze was directso direct that it disconcerted her. She laughed a little uneasily. "Because I knew."

"How did you know?"

"Because"- she began; then again she haughed. "Because," she added quickly, as if moved by a fresh impulse, "Jack Chilcote made it very obvious to any one who was in his morning room at 12 o'clock today that it would be you and not he who would be found filling his place this afternoon. It's all very well to talk about honor, but when one walks into an empty room and sees a telegram as long as a letter open on a bureau"-But her sentence was never finished.

Loder had heard what he came to hear. Any confession she might have to offer was of no moment in his eyes.

"My dear girl," he broke in brusquely, "don't trouble. I should make a most unsatisfactory father confessor." He spoke quickly. His color was still high, but not of annoyance. His suspense was transformed into unpleasant certainty, but the exchange left him surer of himself. His perplexity had dropped to a quiet sense of self reliance. His paramount desire was for solitude in which to prepare for the task that lay before him-the most congenial task the world possessed-the unraveling of Chilcote's tangled skeins. Looking into Lillian's eyes, he smiled. "Goodby," he said, holding out his hand. "I think we've finished-for to-

She slowly extended her fingers. Her expression and attitude were slightly puzzled - a puzzlement that was either spontaneous or singularly well assumed. As their hands touched

she smiled again. "Will you drop in at the Arcadian tonight?" she asked. "It's the dramatized version of 'Other Men's Shoes!' The temptation to make you see it was too irresistible-as you know."

There was a pause while she waited for his answer, her head inclined to one side, her green eyes gleaming. Loder, conscious of her regard, hesitated for a moment. Then his face cleared. "Right!" he said slowly. "The

CHAPTER XXIX. ODER'S frame of mind as he left Cadogan gardens was pe-

culiar. Once more he was liv-

ing in the present-the forceful, exhilarating present, and the knowledge braced him. Upon one point his mind was satisfied. Lillian Astrupp had found the telegram, and it remained to him to render her find valueless. How he proposed to do this, how he proposed to come out triumphant in face of such a situation, was a matter that as yet was shapeless in his mind; nevertheless the danger, the sense of impending conflict, had a savor of life after the inaction of the day and night just passed. Chilcote in his weakness and his entanglement had turned to him, and he in his strength and capacity had responded

His step was firm and his bearing assured as he turned into Grosvenor square and walked toward the familiar

to the appeal

The habit of self deceit is as insidi ous and tenacious as any vice. For one moment on the night of his great speech as he leaned out of Chilcote's carriage and met Chilcote's eyes Loder had seen himself and under the shock of revelation had taken decisive action. But in the hours subsequent to that action the plausible, inner voice had whispered unceasingly, soothing his wounded self esteem, rebuilding stone by stone the temple of his egotism, until at last when Chilcote, panic stricken at his own action, had burst into his rooms ready to plead or to coerce he had found no need for either coercion or entreaty. By a power more subtle and effective than any at his command Loder had been prepared for his coming-unconsciously ready with an acquiescence before his appeal had been made. It was the fruit of this preparation, the inevitable outcome of it, that strengthened his step and steadled his hand as he mounted the steps and opened the hall door of Chilcote's house on that eventful afternoon.

The dignity, the air of quiet solidity. impressed him as it never failed to do. as he crossed the large hall and ascended the stairs—the same stairs that he had passed down almost as an outcast not so many hours before. He was filled with the sense of things regained. Belief in his own star lifted him, as it had done a hundred times before in these same surroundings.

He quickened his steps as the sensation came to him. Then, reaching the head of the stairs, he turned directly toward Eve's sitting room and, gaining the door, knocked. The strength of his eagerness, the quick beating of his pulse as he waited for a response, surprised him. He had told himself many times that his passion, however strong, would never again conquer as it had done two nights ago, and the fact that he had come thus candidly to Eve's room was to his mind a proof that temptation could be dared. Nevertheless there was something disconcerting to a strong man in this merely physical perturbation, and when Eve's voice came to him, giving permission to enter, he paused for an instant to steady himself. Then, with sudden decision, he opened the door and walked into the room.

The blinds were partly drawn, there was a scent of violets in the air, and fire glowed warmly in the grate. He noted these things carefully, telling himself that a man should always be alertly sensible of his surroundings. Then all at once the nice balancing of detail suddenly gave way. He forgot everything but the one circumstance that Eve was standing in the window, her back to the light, her face toward him. With his pulses beating faster and an unsteady sensation in his brain, he mov-

ed forward holding out his hand. "Eve"- he said below his breath. But Eve remained motionless. As he came into the room she had glanced at him-a glance of quick, searching question, then with equal suddenness she had averted her eyes. As he drew close to her now she remained immovable.

"Eve"- he said again. "I wanted to see you-I wanted to explain about yesterday and about this morning." He paused, suddenly disturbed. The full remembrance of the scene in the brougham had surged up at sight of her-had risen a fierce, unquenchable recollection. "Eve"- he began again in a new, abrupt tone.

And then it was that Eve showed herself in a fresh light. From his entrance into the room she had stayed motionless, save for her first glance of acute inquiry, but now her demeanor changed. For almost the first time in Loder's knowledge of her the vitality and force that he had vaguely apprehended below her quiet, serene exterior sprang up like a flame within whose radius things are illuminated. (To be continued.)

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