

afterwards that he was the only son of a railway contractor, who had himself handled the spade, but at last died enormously rich. He spoke blandly, but with a certain quiet authority which I disliked.

"Are you fond of the opera, Mrs. Percivale?" he asked me, in order to make talk.

"I have never been to the opera," I answered.

"Never been to the opera? Ain't you fond of music?"

"Did you ever know a lady that wasn't?"

"Then you must go to the opera."

"But it is just because I fancy myself fond of music that I don't think I should like the opera."

"You can't hear such music anywhere else."

"But the antics of the singers, pretending to be in such furies of passion, yet modulating every note with the cunning of a carver in ivory, seems to me so preposterous! For surely song springs from a brooding over past feeling—I do not mean lost feeling—never from present emotion."

"Ah! you would change your mind after having once been. I should strongly advise you to go, if only for once. You ought now, really."

"An artist's wife must do without such expensive amusements—except her husband's pictures be very popular indeed. I might as well cry for the moon. The cost of a box at the opera for a single night would keep my little household for a fortnight."

"Ah, well—but you should see 'The Barber,'" he said.

"Perhaps if I could hear without seeing I should like it better," I answered.

He fell silent, busying himself with his fish, and when he spoke again turned to the lady on his left. I went on with my dinner. I knew that our host had heard what I said, for I saw him turn rather hastily to his butler.

Mr. Morley is a man difficult to describe, stiff in the back, and long and loose in the neck, reminding me of those toy birds that bob head and tail up and down alternately. When he agrees with anything you say, down comes his head with a rectangular nod; when he does not agree with you, he is so silent and motionless that he leaves you in doubt whether he has heard a word of what you have been saying. His face is hard, and was to me then inscrutable; while what he said always seemed to have little or nothing to do with what he was thinking; and I had not then learned whether he had a heart or not. His features were well-formed, but they and his head and face too small for his body. He seldom smiled except when in doubt. He had, I understood, been very successful in business, and always looked full of schemes.

"Have you been to the Academy yet?" he asked.

"No; this is only the first day of it."

"Are your husband's pictures well hung?"

"As high as Haman," I answered; "skied, in fact. That is the right word, I believe."

"I would advise you to avoid slang, my dear cousin—*professional* slang especially; and to remember that in London there are no professions after six o'clock."

"Indeed!" I returned. "As we came along in the carriage—cabbage, I mean—I saw no end of shops open."

"I mean in society—at dinner—amongst friends, you know."

"My dear Mr. Morley, you have just done asking me about my husband's pictures, and if you listen a moment you will hear that lady next my husband talking to him about Leslie and Turner, and I don't know who more—all in the trade."

"Hush! hush! I beg," he almost whispered, looking agonized. "That's Mrs. Baddeley. Her husband, next to you, is a great picture-buyer. That's why I asked him to meet you."

"I thought there were no professions in London after six o'clock."

"I am afraid I have not made my meaning quite clear to you."

"Not quite. Yet I think I understand you."

"We'll have a talk about it another time."

"With pleasure."

It irritated me rather that he should talk to me, a married woman, as to a little girl who did not know how to behave herself; but his patronage of my husband displeased me far more, and I was on the point of committing the terrible blunder of asking Mr. Baddeley if he had any poor relations; but I checked myself in time, and prayed to know whether he was a member of Parliament. He answered that he was not in the House at present, and asked in return why I had wished to know. I answered that I wanted a bill brought in for the punishment of fraudulent milkmen, for I couldn't get a decent pennyworth of milk in all Camden Town. He laughed, and said it would be a very desirable measure, only too great an interference with the liberty of the subject. I told him that kind of liberty was just what law in general owed its existence to, and was there on purpose to interfere with; but he did not seem to see it.

The fact is I was very silly. Proud of being the wife of an artist, I resented the social injustice which I thought gave artists no place but one of sufferance. Proud also of being poor for Percivale's sake, I made a show of my poverty before people whom I supposed, rightly enough in many cases, to be proud of their riches. But I knew nothing of what poverty really meant, and was

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