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That Last Rehearsal.

By The Duchess,

(Margaret Wolf Hungerford.)





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That Last Rehearsal.

By the "DUCHESS."

Margaret Wolfe Hungerford

NEW YORK:

GAZLAY BROTHERS, 157 and 159 WILLIAM STREET,
1887.

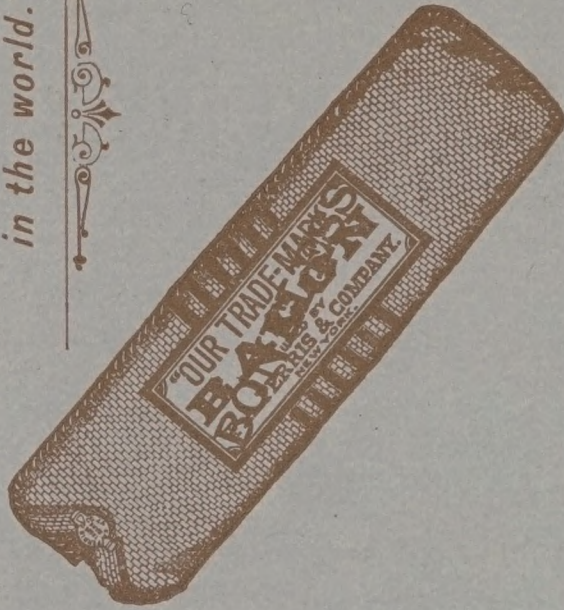
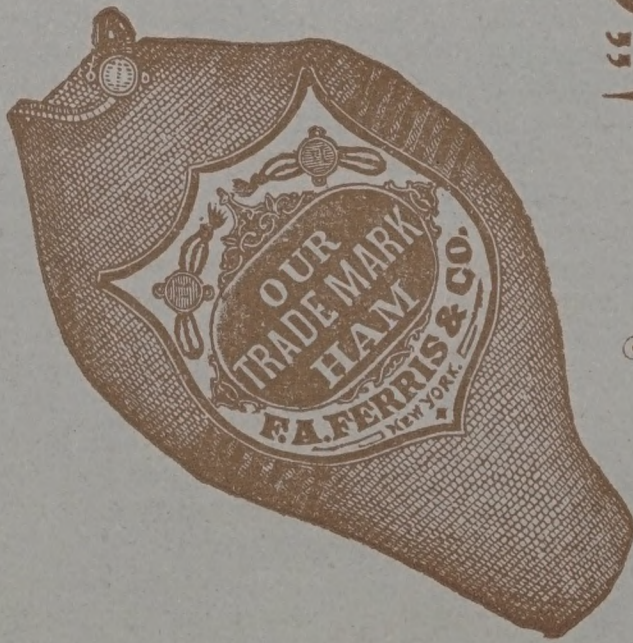
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"That Last Rehearsal."

BY THE "DUCHESS."

HE is standing with his back to the fire, his eyes bent upon the ground, lost in thought. So, evidently, are all the little dogs deep in contemplation, as they lie all round him, with their chilly noses turned toward the cozy fire, that laughs and crackles and leaps in mad enjoyment, although May is far advanced. At his feet the three rough terriers—Rum, Charlie, and Gip—snore luxuriously; on his right the setter pup blinks softly, on his left the fox-terrier, handsome Cheekie, dozes; while in the center lies Crinkle, the small toy, wide awake and evidently eager to challenge the world to single combat. This latter, when dispassionately considered, is but a melancholy creature, all legs, and no body to signify beyond an aspiring tail and two dejected ears. A forlorn thing, fit only for the tomb, but beloved of its master; so it lives, and its legs grow, and it prospers.

The clock ticks, the moments fly, the gilt hands point to half-past three. Just now a soft, distinct chime proclaims the hour, and Mr. Dynecourt, rousing himself, wonders vaguely what on earth he shall do. This thought is so perplexing that involuntarily he tightens his clasp upon the letter he holds in his left hand, and brings his foot down with some emphasis upon the hearth-rug. Probably he meant no offense, but all the little dogs resent the hurried movement, and, as though pulled by a universal string, rise and gaze reproachfully upon him. Their master takes no notice of their indignation, but with moody eyes seeks, as it were, to look into futurity.

At this moment the door opens, and a pretty creature dressed in deep mourning enters the room. Descriptions, like comparisons, are odious; therefore I shall not describe my heroine, but will ask you to picture her to yourself as the very sweetest thing in all the world. Surely beauty lies not in form or feature but in expression; and she is tender, *riante*, provoking, *gracieuse*—all just as it suits her.

Mr. Dynecourt is twenty-six, and very much in love. Georgie Hamilton is seventeen, and very much in love too. But *he* is in love with her, and *she* is only in love with life and the freshness and fairness of this pleasant world.

As she enters now and advances up the long room, she smiles brightly. "I have news for you," she says, with large, pleased, eager eyes. "Do you know, Polly has five of the loveliest pups imaginable—regular darlings! All a deep brown, and without a single spot."



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“Has she?”—absently.

“‘Has she?’ How very enthusiastic! What’s the matter, Davy? Something is wrong, I know, and I’m sure it is in that letter. How I do hate letters!”

“Yes, it *is* in the letter,” returns he uncomfortably, and somewhat forlornly. “It is from your uncle, John Greaves, asking you—to go and live with them.”

“I sha’n’t go,” says Miss Georgie, promptly. “Not likely. May I ask what put such a festive notion in his head? Am I not very well as I am?”

“That’s just it,”—crumpling the unlucky letter nervously, while staring with fixed determination at Rum’s silver head. “Your uncle doesn’t think so. In fact, he thinks you shouldn’t—live here any longer.”

“Not live here? in my *home*? And why!”

He is silent. He draws himself up with a quick movement, and opens his lips as though to speak, but checks himself resolutely, and as a further preventive to speech brings his teeth down sharply upon the end of his blonde mustache.

“I certainly sha’n’t go to Aunt Maud’s,” goes on Georgie, with decision; “nothing shall induce me. I once spent a month there, and I’m not going to try it again. I don’t fancy having Julia’s perfections retailed to me half a dozen times a day, and I won’t be treated as a baby when I am seventeen. I can’t bear Aunt Maud. *Do* let me stay on here, Davy; what does it matter what any one may say?”

“You could only stay on here in one character,” replies he, quietly, though he pales a little and regards her searchingly.

“And that is——”

“As my wife.”

“Well, then, I *will* be your wife,” decides Miss Hamilton, with flattering haste, though perhaps there is something not altogether satisfactory in the air of self-sacrifice that accompanies the little speech. Then she stops short, and laughs rather awkwardly. “I forgot,” she says, looking down and trifling with her white fingers. “Pardon me; I forgot *you* might not view the idea in quite such a cheerful light as I do.”

“You must be blind,” he says, coming forward and speaking quickly, “if you can have any doubt on that subject. I love you, Georgie; surely you know that. But I know you do not love me in—in that way; and I would not hurry or tempt you into a marriage that later on you might bitterly repent.”

“I shouldn’t”—calmly; “I am sure of it. Why do you always imagine unpleasant things?”

“If I could be quite sure you knew your own mind—that you really *wished* to marry me,” says he, anxiously, some degree of hope rising in his mind as he listens to the seeming earnestness of her words.

“You may be *quite* sure,” returns she, reassuringly. “I would no *anything* to escape Aunt Maud.”

He drops her hand abruptly and walks back to his old position on the hearth-rug. “No; it is out of the question,” he says.

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"You do not care for me, and I would not do you such an injury as to marry you under the circumstances."

"Then *don't!*" she says petulantly, and, turning to the window, lets her eyes wander tenderly, lingeringly, over the lovely parks and uplands that seem to swell and glow beneath her gaze.

At this point she lets one hand smite the palm of the other sharply, and, turning with a little passionate gesture from the window, faces him. "What am I to do?" she says. "At least help me to think, as by your decree I *must* leave my—home."

Her eyes fill; her lips tremble slightly; her hands fall together with an involuntary movement and clasp each other closely. "I will not go to my aunt's," she says, quickly. "I have money; why should I not take a cottage—the Elms, for instance—and live by myself, or with some nice old lady?—though, as a rule, I hate old ladies."

"That is a good thought," says Dynecourt, eagerly, some light coming back again into his eyes. (If this can be accomplished, she will at least be always near him; that is, until—Here the glad light fades again suddenly, and Melancholy once more marks him for her own.) "It can be managed, I dare say, if your uncle gives consent. I know an old lady, a friend of my aunt's, who would, I am sure, be glad to come to you. Yes, it might be arranged, and—the Elms would exactly suit you."

"As well as any other place"—with a shrug of her pretty shoulders. "You have refused to marry me, and you have turned me out of doors; therefore, I must needs be content with the lesser goods the gods provide."

"Georgie," exclaims he, angrily, keen reproach and pain in his tone, "how dare you speak to me like that? How have I deserved it at your hands? It is unlike you to be unjust." He is gazing down with tender severity upon her willful, provoking face; and at last, when she can endure the intensity of his regard no longer, she raises her head; and, meeting his eyes, lets her mouth relax into a soft, irresistible smile. But he is too hurt and sad at heart to return the smile, and presently she becomes aware that his eyes are full of tears.

"I have vexed you," she says, remorsefully, slipping her slender fingers into his; "forgive me. I am bad to you always. But one cannot be amiable forever, and just now I am angry with Mrs. Grundy, because she will not let me be happy in my own way; and I think I am a little angry with you, too. It isn't the pleasantest thing in the world to propose to some one and be ignominiously *rejected*. Now, is it?"

"My darling, how can I act differently? You are only a child: you do not know your own mind yet. A time might come when— No, it would be madness toward both of us to marry you without being fully assured of your love."

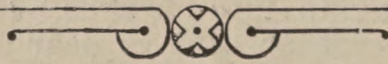
"Would it? And yet I know I like you better than anybody I ever met," persists she, a little wistfully.

"That is saying nothing, you know so few. But listen, Georgie. Let a year go by: at the end of twelve months, if you still wish to marry me, I shall say to myself, 'She loves me!' If

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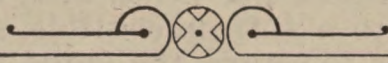
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not, why, then"—sadly--"I shall know how wise I was to-day. In the meantime, promise me one thing," says Dynecourt, earnestly, closing his hand tighter upon hers, "that whenever you feel yourself growing—*interested*—in any one, you will tell me of it *instantly*."

"I promise,"—with faint surprise in look and tone.

"You will not hide it until it is too late?"

"Certainly not. Of course"—with a little mocking smile that irradiates her whole face—"you are alluding to George Blount, or perhaps to Captain Stannus, who, I hear, is expected at the Grange next month."

"I may be," replies he, quietly, though some slight discomposure betrays itself in his manner as she mentions the last name. "I have your promise, however, have I not?—that you will give me timely warning of the very first sign of tenderness you feel."

"I promise faithfully," returns she, laughingly, "though I know you are imagining what will never come to pass."

A fortnight has come and gone. Uncle John has given in; so has Aunt Maud with startling amiability. It is a settled thing that for the future Miss Hamilton is to be mistress of her own actions *and* the Elms (a picturesque cottage, without an elm within a mile of it), while the Park loses its sweetest inmate, and Dynecourt grows to almost detest the beautiful place that now, in Georgie's absence, seems bereft of its chief charm.

Gradually the long drawing-rooms assume the unlovely look of all rooms in which no humanity lingers; the dining-room grows gaunt, the galleries ghostly. Only the library retains in part its old appearance, as here its master sits at night, brooding sadly over her he loves.

As for Georgie, she pines persistently for her lovely Park, and regrets every hour she lives her enforced exile from it. Once, about three weeks after her change of residence, loitering among the flowers alone with Davy (having eluded Mrs. Wright's vigilance), she turns to him and says suddenly, with some childish bitterness and envy:

"Well, and are you happy, now you have the Park all to yourself?"

"Does that speech deserve an answer?"—reproachfully.

"Take it, however. I am as miserable as I well can be. Every room and hall and corridor reminds me ceaselessly of—what I sorely miss each hour of the day."

"I am glad of it"—wickedly. "The more wretched you are the more I shall enjoy it. I can never forgive you for having refused me. *Such* an indignity! Even still my heart beats when I think of it."

"You jest about what is cruel earnest to me."

"What a tone!"—laughing. "You remind me of the frogs and those unpleasant boys. And yet surely I have stated only bare facts, you *did* refuse me."

"Ask me again when you can tell me honestly you love me."

"What if I told you so now?"



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"I shouldn't believe you."

"No? Then what is love?" demands she, standing still before him in the center of the path, framed in by glowing, fragrant roses, and gazing with calm inquiry, though somewhat mirthfully, into his gray eyes. "I mean, how does one feel when one is in love?"

"You confess your ignorance?" asks he, with a slight smile that is full of dejection and regret. "Well, let me try to enlighten it. First, when one loves, one has a passionate longing to be near the beloved—a sense of desolation when apart from her."

"So?" says Georgie, raising her brows slightly. "Now, don't you think—*please* do not believe me unsympathetic—but doesn't it occur to you that—that—it might grow slightly monotonous?"

"No, it does *not*," emphatically. "To *you*, of course, it might."

"Ah!" murmurs Georgie, gazing with expressive regret at her delicate, filbert-shaped nails.

"In the second place," goes on Mr. Dynecourt, "one is always absurdly jealous."

"Is one? But, my *dear* Davy, how very dreadful! Do you not think jealousy a rather vulgar sentiment?"

"It may be, but it is at the same time a thoroughly natural and utterly unconquerable sentiment."

"I'm absolutely certain *I* couldn't be made jealous," says Georgie, with uplifted chin. "I flatter myself I am above all that. It is low and commonplace."

"Perhaps you look upon love itself in the same light," says he, a little bitterly. "Remember, it too is commonplace!"

"No, no. I am not so sure of that," returns she, reflectively. "Well, go on. Besides monotony and jealousy is there anything else?"

"As I regard it, yes. I think," says this old-fashioned young man, in a low tone that he firmly believes befits the occasion—"I think one would feel if one's dearest died that one must die too."

"Well, now," says Georgie, in a clear, healthy, business-like tone. "I don't believe a word of that. It is ridiculous: it is too much."

"Didn't I say so? I told you beforehand you knew nothing about it," says he, hastily, a little indignation, a little disgust, and a good deal of pain mixed together in his voice. "I do not expect you to agree with me, because *you* have never loved."

"I dare say you think you know best," says Miss Georgie, with some just irritation, "but I ask you to look round at those among our friends who have loved, and see if you speak sensibly. There was Maud Eldon, for instance: when news came that Frank had been shot in that stupid Ashantee affair, did *she* droop and die? And yet they were quite devoted: we all knew that. And then there was Jane Newcome: did *she* find an early grave because poor George succumbed to that fever? She didn't. I never saw any one grow so fat and so—so *pleasant* as

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CATARRH



HAY-FEVER

she has done of late. Then remember Mrs. Hartley's case: you know how awfully fond of each other she and Arthur were, and yet when he was brought home on a door to her from the hunting-field, did *she* die? No: she only got married again. I must repeat it, Davy: I don't believe a word of it."

"Of course it isn't in one's power to die," says Davy, apologetically, feeling somewhat crushed by this heavy weight of evidence, "but at least one would feel *anxious* to die. It would seem the hardest part of one's misery that perhaps one couldn't. Now, I ask you, Georgie"—in a challenging tone—"do you think you would feel anxious to die if I died?"

"How can I say?"—perplexed, letting her rounded cheek sink into her palm. Then, suddenly, "How can I think about it at all, when you are alive and well, and so very near to me?" she says, sweetly, moving a degree closer to him and turning upon him the softest, tenderest smile imaginable.

But this smile, that might reasonably be believed capable of melting an iceberg, fails in its purpose. Mr. Dynecourt distinctly declines to be melted, and, fearing to meet her eyes, looks resolutely over her head toward the distant hills beyond, behind which the golden sun is sinking slowly, slowly, emitting in his dying agonies a yellow haze that covers all the land.

Presently, however, his meditations are brought to an ignominious close. Georgie, springing to her feet, seizes him eagerly by the arm, and by an animated glance brings him to his feet. "Let us run," she says, with the utmost *bonhomie*, as though their late passage-at-arms had never occurred. "I see Mrs. Wright looming in the dim vista of the future, and her coming means platitudes, mild expostulations, and shawls. Let us escape while we may."

With this she turns the corner hastily, and, he following as in duty bound, they presently find themselves in an obscure arbor, moldy and earwiggy, but secure.

Georgie, seating herself at the rustic table, lets her chin fall into her hands and silently contemplates her companion, who is looking his severest and is crushing without remorse the "starry jasmine" that climbs the arbor's sides as he leans against it.

"How quiet you are!" she says, at length, with a slightly provoking smile, being in a teasing humor. "Is it your temper or your toothache? Speak to me, Davy."

"I am afraid you don't like Mrs. Wright," he says, "and it must be unpleasant for you, living with her, and that——"

"Not in the least; I like her very much, but I don't love her, that is all. She is tiresome, poor soul! and *will* think I have a delicate chest."

"She is a very good woman."

"That is just it"—demurely.

"What is?"

"Her being so good. She is *too* good; that is her great fault. She is the most perfect woman I ever met, and I don't like perfect people; they disagree with me. Oh, that one could find a flaw somewhere! But one looks for it in vain. There are no

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exceptions to her rules, and she is never wrong. Good people are very disagreeable; I prefer the other sort myself."

"You make me wish myself of the other sort," says he, smiling.

"Don't wish yourself different, you are the happy medium. But Captain Stannus, *he is quite* of the other sort."

"You have met him?"—turning with a palpable start to examine her features. "When? where?"

"Last night, at the Grange; you know he was expected there"—coloring distinctly, though faintly. "I dined there; did I not tell you! I dine there so often it scarcely impresses me. Mrs. Blount came herself at six o'clock, and made me walk back with her, as she said she was most anxious I should meet her brother."

"No doubt."

"He is very handsome, and was very agreeable and—attentive and pleasant."

"Was he?"

"Yes."

"Go on, Georgie; you have something more to tell me." He has turned his face from hers, and is unconsciously reducing to ruin a branch of the jasmine that has foolishly wandered within his grasp.

"Not much. Only once, you know, you made me promise if I ever felt interested (was not that the word?) in any one I was to let you know directly. You remember."

"Yes, yes."

"Well"—with a slightly embarrassed laugh, and a blush that deepens every moment by fine degrees upon her pretty cheeks—"I think I rather like this new friend. We had dancing in the large hall after dinner, and he danced with me all the evening, and said a good many charming things. And *he* didn't tell me I was a silly child. And altogether we had a lovely time."

She stops with another little laugh at her Americanism, but Dynecourt makes no reply. She cannot see his expression, and, as his silence troubles her, she rises, and, coming to his side, slips her hand through his arm. "Have I vexed you?" she says; "do you really care? Of late I have thought—not. You scold me so much, and look so sadly at me sometimes. Perhaps, after all"—with a little sigh—"I *am* only a silly child. Mind, I am not sure that I feel even the faintest interest in this new-comer; only it certainly did occur to me that he was good to talk to, and I liked his way of dancing. And you know you made me promise faithfully to tell you of the very first sign of—"

"I know," interrupts he impatiently, in a compressed tone, taking no notice of the white little hand that is so gently pressing his arm.

"To-morrow night," she goes on, earnestly, "I shall be dining there again, and——"

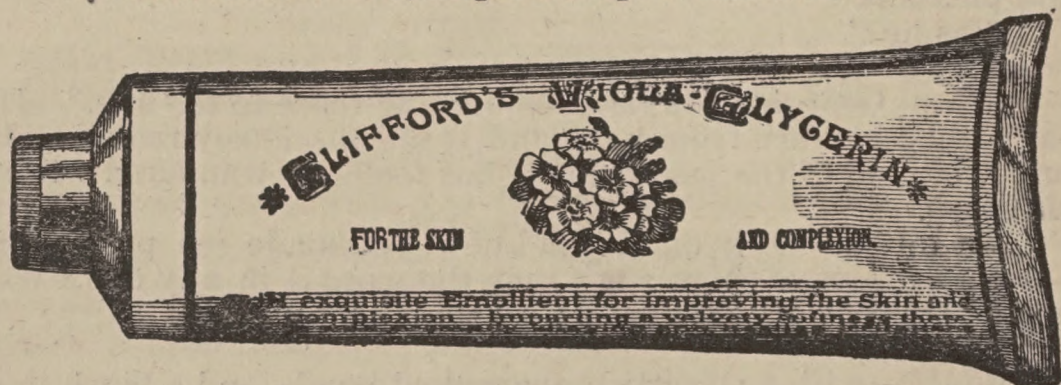
"Again?"

"Yes. Are you not to be there? George said he would ride down this afternoon to ask you; I suppose you missed him."

"It doesn't matter; I sha'n't go."

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“Not when *I* am going to be of the party!”—reproachfully.

“No”—brutally.

“Well, you must please yourself about that, of course”—with a flattering sigh. “But I was going to say to you that when to-morrow night is past I shall know more positively whether I really like Captain Stannus or not. Come here on Friday and I will tell you all about it.”

Dynecourt smiles in spite of himself. “And yet you were indignant a moment since because I said you were a child!” he says, half musingly. “I keep to your bargain. On Friday I shall be here to learn my fate.”

He leaves her presently and goes home full of sad forebodings, as miserable as any woman could desire. All the evening (that seems so interminable) he fights with his fears, and refuses to find comfort in his choicest cigars. Dinner is an abomination, bed a mockery.

Every hour of the succeeding day he torments himself afresh, and as twilight falls almost makes up his mind to waive ceremony and, in spite of the refusal sent, dine at the Grange, if only to judge with his own jealous eyes what amount of favor Stannus is finding in the eyes of his beloved. But pride and obstinacy prevail. No, he will not interfere in any way; let her give her heart to this stranger if she will; let this fancy, born of a few hours, grow and supplant the affection that has lasted for years. And so on and on.

As Friday morning deepens into noon, his mood becomes even more depressing. Why fight against fortune? Why seek to compel fate? Why go to the Elms at all, to hear what he already knows too well? Better take the next train to town, or shut himself up in his private den, or *die* first.

Five minutes after making a solemn choice between these three evils he finds himself in the hall, gazing with gentle meditation into his hat. Whether he has mistaken time and place, and is about to say a prayer into it, will never be known, but presently he draws himself up, and as though hardly conscious of the act, places the hat firmly on his head. After which, still with the abstracted look upon his face, he opens the hall door and takes the road that leads to the Elms.

Whilst yet at a distance from that paradise, he sees standing at its gate a very gracious figure, evidently on the lookout for somebody. Coming nearer he can see it is Miss Georgie herself, clad in a marvelous costume and innumerable smiles.

“It is all right,” she cries, gayly, at the top of her fresh young voice, running to greet him. Then, as they meet, she leaves her hand in his as she goes on to tell him her story. “I don’t care in the least for him,” she says; “he is rather a prig. I found out all about it at once. You know you said jealousy was a chief ingredient, and last night it so happened that I offended his lordship early in the evening so grossly that he declined to notice me afterward. He would not even ask me to dance, but devoted himself to that pretty Miss Hanley, and—would you believe it?—I didn’t mind it in the least; in fact, it amused me. So, you see, I don’t care a bit for him.”

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“Sulky beast!” says Mr. Dynecourt, with withering contempt, but in the cheeriest of tones.

“Yes, isn’t he? As you weren’t there”—with a reproachful glance—“I consoled myself with George Blount, and enjoyed myself immensely. Now, aren’t you glad?”

This question is asked so naively, and his relief is so great, that he bursts out laughing. His companion joins in merrily.

“Glad doesn’t express it!” exclaims he. “I cannot tell you what a miserable time I have put in since last I saw you. My darling, how pretty you are looking this morning! And isn’t that a very charming dress you are wearing?”

Naturally this pleases her, and she instantly proceeds to tell him all about this desirable gown, where she got it, who made it, and the exact amount of the bill sent in to her by Elise. Whilst imparting all this information to her puzzled hearer, she induces him in the most artful manner to tell her three distinct times how very becoming it is to her. Feeling at last satisfied that he is thoroughly impressed by her very charming appearance, she thinks fit to change the conversation.

She is in one of her kindest humors, so that when his visit of two short hours has drawn to a close she makes him a noble offer of her company as far as the gate. On their way thither she says:

“When next you are asked to the Grange you must come; it is a very pleasant house and great fun, and I like to see you there. But”—with a swift glance from under her long lashes—“you mustn’t dance so much with Florence Blount as you did the last night we were there together in poor auntie’s time. Do you remember?”

“Hardly.”

“What a politic answer! You know you danced all night with her. By the bye”—with a charming assumption of indifference—“does she dance well?”

“Very well,” replies he, with all a man’s hopeless stupidity.

“Really?” Then after a suspicious pause, “I shouldn’t have thought it. She looks heavy.”

“She has rather too good a figure to be called ‘heavy,’ I think,”—still more stupidly.

“A charming figure!”—stiffly. “I like people inclining toward *embonpoint* myself; they are much more worthy of admiration than meager creatures like—like *me*, for instance. She is very handsome too, isn’t she?”

“Yes,”—absently. He is thinking of anything in the world but Florence Blount, but how can she know that?

“Very handsome?” says she, with uncalled-for energy. “Altogether, I think she would make a very suitable wife for you.”

“Georgie!” rousing himself from his pleasant day-dreams—in which his companion of the moment bears so large a part—with a palpable start.

“Yes; why not? You think she dances divinely, has the loveliest figure you ever saw, and is the handsomest woman in the world.”



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“Did I say all that?”

“Every word, and more. So, I see no reason why you should not marry her.”

“Except the simple one that I love another,” replies he, coldly, feeling some anger at her heartless suggestion.

“I don’t believe you do,” says she, pettishly, though considerably mollified. “At least, you never tell me you think *me* good to look at.”

“Why should I bore you by telling you over and over again what you know so well already?”—impatiently. “Good-bye, Georgie: I have evidently tired you out. I must really go.”

“You are cross,” says Miss Georgie, coaxingly; “but don’t go for a little minute, it is so long since I have seen you.”

“What a humbug you are!”—smiling. “As if you could forget that only one day has passed since our last meeting!”

“I forget everything when I am with you,” says this coquette, archly. Then there is a pause, and then she says, very softly and with an air of the utmost importance; “Davy!”

“Well?” says Davy, stopping short, and feeling sure some dark secret is about to be disclosed.

“I want to ask you a question”—taking hold of a button on his coat and twisting it nervously, to its serious detriment.

“Then ask it, darling”—very anxiously.

“Do I or Florence Blount dance best?”

Mr. Dynecourt, though strongly tempted to give way to merriment at this solution of her gravity, with a wisdom beyond his years, refrains. “You, decidedly,” he says, with emphasis.

“You are sure?”

“Positive.”

“There is something else. A moment since you said you thought her *very* handsome.”

“Did I? I don’t believe——”

“Yes, you did. Now, don’t you think—her nose—a little large, eh, Davy?”—with a faint laugh and some embarrassment.

“Do say you think her nose the largest you ever saw.”

“Quite the largest”—with comforting conviction; “utterly out of all proportion.”

“I fully agree with you”—with a delicious laugh. “And her figure? It is very fat, isn’t it?”

“Abominably so.”

“And you hate fat women?”

“I simply loathe them; I only care for ‘meager little creatures’ like—you.”

“Rude boy! But, honestly, you think me prettier than she is?”

“A thousand times prettier. My darling child, what an absurd question! She is not fit to be named in the same day with you.”

“Ah, now I shall say good-bye really, my dearest Davy,” says Miss Hamilton, with considerable *empressement*, tendering to him both her friendly little hands, that return undisguisedly his farewell pressure.



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Mrs. Blount of the Grange is a very clever woman—not only clever, but sensible, two things that don't always go together—and is devoted to her step-brother, Captain Stannus.

The captain is handsome and susceptible; Miss Hamilton, according to Mrs. Blount's lights, is handsome and susceptible also. Why should not two handsome, susceptible people be brought together, and by a little judicious management be united in heart and fortune? I think when Mrs. Blount got to this point in her meditations, she put the fortune before the heart, as being the more important thing of the two. Miss Hamilton's fortune is considerable—almost as pretty as herself: the captain's is inconsiderable, being, indeed, of the Mrs. Harris order, vague and shadowy. Beyond all doubt, Georgie would make a very suitable wife for dear Fred.

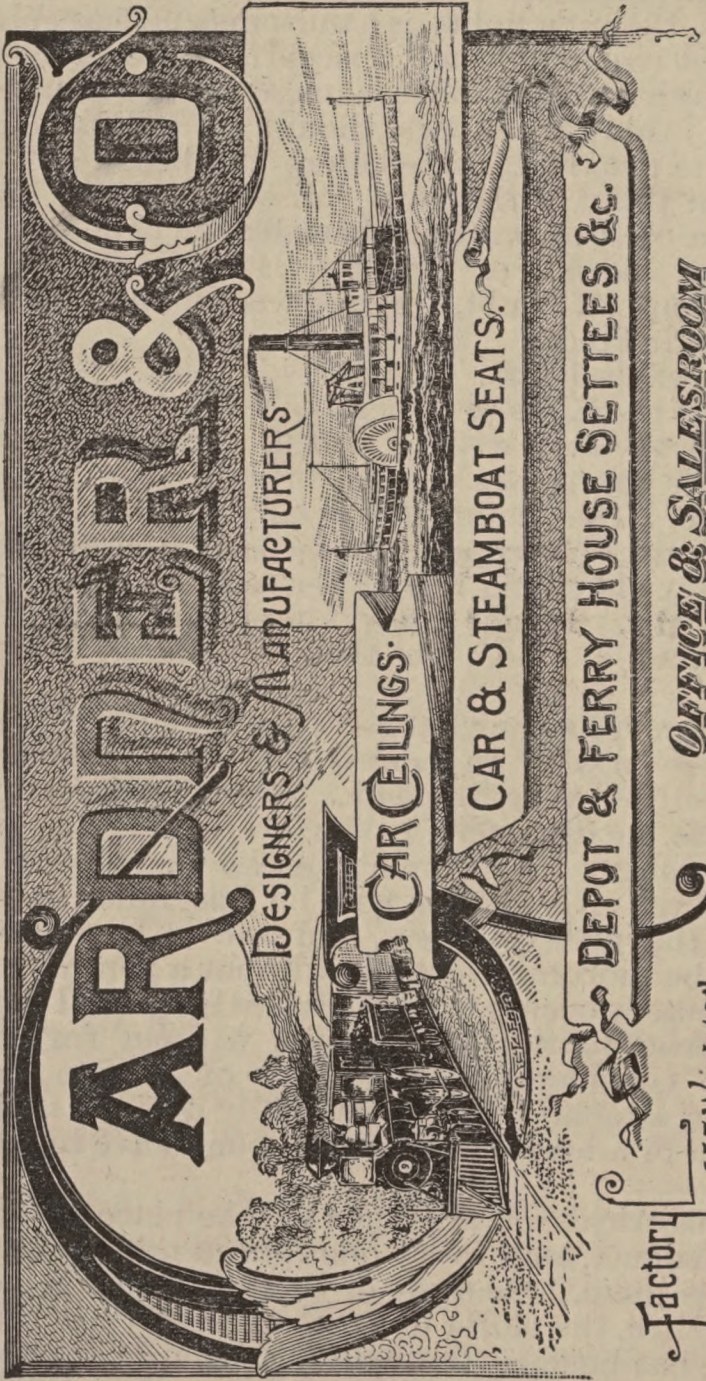
Nothing can exceed Mrs. Blount's kindness. She gives the little mistress of the Elms to understand that the Grange is her home whenever she may wish to visit it. She is positively unhappy if a whole day passes without bringing her a glimpse of darling Georgie. The county (especially the mothers of nice young men) admires her conduct immensely, and tells her with a smile how very charming it is of her to be so attentive to the little orphaned girl. It says a few other things, too—behind her back, and without a smile; but these, of course, she does not hear.

Fred at first proves somewhat refractory, being rather averse to matrimony, even with an heiress, and openly disinclined to “range” himself for years to come. But when a fortnight has drawn to a close, he discovers, to his everlasting chagrin, that his heart is no longer in his own possession, but safe in Miss Georgie's keeping. Against his will he has fallen a victim to the charms of the pretty heiress, and knows he would accept her gladly in the morning were she without a penny.

About this time it occurs to Mrs. Blount's fruitful brain that it is better to bring matters to a crisis without further delay. She takes into consideration the effect of private theatricals upon a budding attachment, and mentally decides that the frequent rehearsal of a love-scene must be conducive to the desired result.

So private theatricals are arranged to take place at the Grange on the 3d of August, and every one for ten miles around is invited to witness them. Georgie, of course, is to act; so is Stannus; so is Florence, the eldest daughter; so is Dynecourt; but he, unfortunately, has business that will keep him in London a good deal just at this time, so is not available, and some one else is selected for his part. He will return to the county, however, the day before the all-important event, and will gladly stay at the Grange from Monday till Wednesday, Tuesday being the day appointed for the performance.

On Monday, when Dynecourt arrives, he finds chaos reigning and nobody to be found anywhere. Strolling through the rooms in search of Georgie (being filled with a desire to see her *riante* face light up as he gives her the costly trinket he has selected for her with such loving care in town), he comes to the door of



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one of the smaller conservatories, across which a heavy velvet curtain is hanging, and, lifting it partially, looks in. As he looks, his grasp involuntarily tightens upon the velvet, and his face whitens until his very lips are bloodless. Spellbound, as though rooted to the spot, he gazes at the scene within.

In the center of the stone floor stands Georgie, looking very lovely, very earnest, with her blue eyes full of tender longing, while at her feet kneels the gallant captain, evidently pleading passionately for the small hand he is holding so closely, fondly, between both his own. His face is tragic—perhaps a degree *too* tragic, if only rage and despair would allow Dynecourt to notice it. But the lover-like attitude is as nothing to what follows. At this luckless instant the captain speaks, addressing Georgie in a tone almost frenzied in its vehemence.

“Darling,” says the captain, “for the last time I kneel to you, and entreat you to hear me. Do not, I pray you, let the adulation of another” (“That’s *me*,” says Dynecourt, savagely, between his set teeth) “blind you to the honest and heart-felt affection I offer you. In you are centered all my hopes of bliss. Do not condemn me to life-long misery, but say you will be mine.”

Dynecourt draws his breath hard, and awaits with maddening impatience for the reply to this florid speech. It comes slowly, with evidently modest reluctance, from Georgie’s pretty lips. Her head is downcast; her hand lies tranquilly in her companion’s; she has turned her face a little to one side.

“How can I answer you?” she says, in clear but trembling accents. “And yet why should I shrink from telling you the truth? Yes, I confess it: my heart has long been in your keeping, and, if you wish it, I am yours.”

Dropping the curtain, with a smothered and rather highly flavored word, Dynecourt turns away, grief and bitter disappointment at his heart. At last the dreadful awakening has come; she has discovered her heart is not her own to bestow or withhold at her pleasure. She is right, of course—quite right. Her love is not to be controlled as she thinks fit; but why had she not *told* him? To find such a child so skillful in the art of concealing chills him to his heart’s core: and he had believed her so true, so sweet, so unworldly! With apparently the face of a guileless girl she has proved herself old in the wiles and deceptions of the practiced flirt.

Then a moment comes when he tells himself he is glad of his awakening, and pictures to himself the desolation of a life spent with one who would bear for him no love. But, somehow, it is a dismal gladness, that brings with it no consolation.

Later on in the day, when they meet, his manner, though civil, is markedly cold and indifferent, while his demeanor toward Miss Blount, whom he takes in to dinner, is devoted, almost *prononce*. He takes not the smallest notice of the pretty puzzled child, who watches him with great bewildered eyes and tells herself a thousand times she must be dreaming. What has she done?

Then comes bed-hour, and everybody says good-night to every-

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body else, and still Dynecourt is so attentive to Miss Blount that he barely notices the small, soft hand that is held out to him as its owner bids him good-night in somewhat troubled tones. So the cold farewell is said, and all separate; and two people at least in the house lie awake half the night through very wretchedness, and one cries bitterly until her richly-fringed lids are pink and sorrowful.

Next morning it is the same thing over again. At breakfast, Dynecourt is seated next Florence, and is carrying on with her an animated discussion about toy terriers. He barely notices Georgie's greeting, and then goes back to the terrier question, as though the success of his argument is all he lives for.

It is half-past eight; the guests have arrived, and Dynecourt in his side seat is gazing moodily into space, hardly aware that the curtain has risen and that the play has commenced.

There is the usual programme. Beauty; Beauty's true and disinterested admirer; true and disinterested admirer's villainous rival; the smart chambermaid; the funny man—all are here.

Dynecourt, glowering in his corner, declines to laugh at the funny man, and hardly deigns to notice the brilliant costumes that go such a long way in private theatricals.

Two scenes go on successfully, and the curtain at length rises on the third and last. It progresses; Beauty is being tenderly driven into a corner; the true and disinterested is gaining ground, until finally, with an energy worthy of even a better cause, he flings himself at Beauty's feet, and for the fourth time entreats her to look favorably upon his suit.

At this moment it occurs to Dynecourt, whose eyes are fixed upon the ground, that something not altogether unfamiliar to his ear is being said. He starts, grows a little pale, and turns his attention to the stage. Captain Stannus is on his knees, and has full possession of Georgie's hand. He is uttering an impassioned speech, the words of which fall clearly upon Dynecourt's ear.

“Do not, I pray you, let the adulation of another blind you to the honest and heartfelt affection I offer you——”

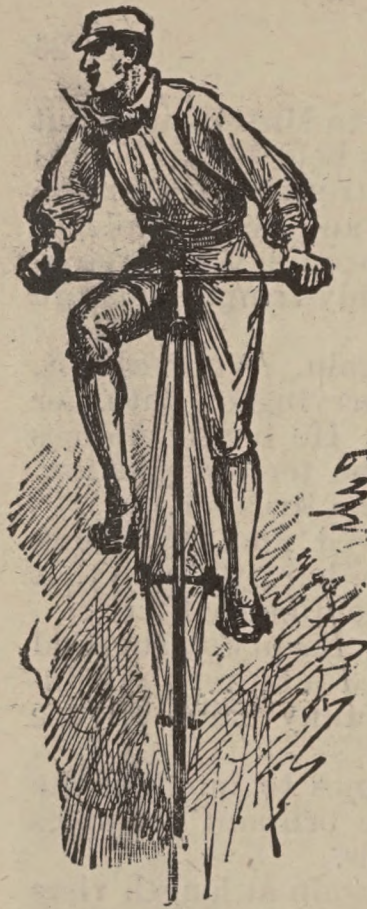
It is all only too palpable. Dynecourt gazes at the actors blankly, full of a horrible misgiving. Then comes Beauty's reply.

Georgie is perhaps not quite so well up in her part to-night as she was yesterday, when in the conservatory she rehearsed to an unseen audience. Her tone falters; her eyes are unsmiling, a curious expression of pain has fallen athwart, and somewhat mars, the joyousness of her usually *piquante* face. For one brief instant her glance wanders, and, traveling over the heads of the listening guests, meets and questions Dynecourt. There is a world of disappointment and reproach in that tender glance, and then the long lashes droop, and the eyes return again to the suppliant before her.

Remorse, self-reproach, keen anger at his own folly, threaten to overwhelm Dynecourt, and would perhaps gain mastery but for the extreme feeling of relief that grows within him and per-

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meates his whole being. He scarcely sees how the play ends, but as the curtain falls pushes his way triumphantly through the throng of applauders, and, crossing the hall, enters the impromptu greenroom, where actors and actresses are all talking and laughing and congratulating each other freely on the happiness of the whole affair. But the little figure so charming in its old-world finery has disappeared. Georgie is nowhere to be seen.

Florence Blount, resplendent in powder and patches, comes sailing toward him. She is of the large and fleshy type, and looks uncommonly well in powder—a fact of which she is fully aware.

“Have you come to say something pretty to us?” she says, with her orthodox smile. “It is scarcely form—is it?—to force an *entree* into our private room; but we forgive you. Oh, Georgie? Yes, how well she acted, but how painfully nervous she was just at last! Did you notice? She was hardly off the stage when she burst out crying, and said she felt tired and frightened. Poor little thing! She has gone to her room; Katie is with her, I fancy.”

“Ah,” says Dynecourt. If his life depended upon it, he could not at this moment form a sentence. His eyes are lowered, his tone might mean anything.

“Don’t you think you like old-fashioned plays?” goes on Miss Blount, vivaciously. “The dressing and that is so much more effective.”

Dynecourt murmurs something.

“Oh, thanks, ever so many, but I am quite tired of hearing that. Yes, powder is becoming. I wish some great lady would adopt it for common use, and then we should all follow suit; and as for the patches, I really think I shall take to them without waiting for a lead from any great lady. Georgie? No, I am almost sure she will not come down again to-night. You see, she is so upset, nervous, what you will,” etc.

Dynecourt, disappointed, impatient, turns away, and, after a decent delay, frames a proper excuse and quits the house. He is conscience-stricken, and yet at heart more glad, more hopeful, than he has ever been in all his life before.

* * * * *

It is evening, but very early evening; as yet upon its borders the baby Night sits crouching, not daring to advance. All the earth is still; not a murmur, not a whisper from the distant ocean, that lies sweetly sleeping in the bay, comes to disturb the calm and tender silence of the dying day.

Suddenly upon the great quiet a little angry bark falls noisily, then another and another, and all Mr. Dynecourt’s merry terriers, flinging themselves against the entrance gate of the Elms, burst it open, and with one accord rush up the graveled path. Their master follows them slowly, hesitatingly, with a palpably guilty air.

The little dogs run on before, Charley scampering well in front and barking vigorously, as is his wont. Coming to a certain corner, half hidden in the dusky shadows, they pause, and with

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a sniff of recognition they bound toward it, where a slender figure upon a rustic seat reclines somewhat sadly.

The young man sees her too, and advances with singular reluctance. How well she receives his apologies, this pretty, passionate, ill-used child? His heart beats with considerable rapidity, as the small figure rises, and, coming quietly from out the gloom, holds out to him a cold, unfriendly hand.

"Good-evening," she says, icily. Her eyelids are suspiciously red, her head is bent.

"Good-evening," replies he, nervously, and then speech forsakes him and her, and silence, short but eloquent, follows. At length he breaks it. "I only came for a minute or two to ask how you are after Tuesday night's fatigue," he says, uncomfortably, and rather disjointedly.

"How kind of you!"—in a tone that strikes cold upon his heart. "I am only pretty well, thank you. My head has ached horribly all day. It has got into my eyes, the pain, and made me wretched."

"So I can see," returns he, gently, gazing with tender solicitude upon the telltale lids. "Have you done nothing for it?"

"Everything, but nothing has done me good"—with a faint touch of pettishness.

"Try eau-de-cologne," says he, more because he can think of nothing else to say than from any strong belief in Johann Maria Farina.

"I have none; I used the last drop I possessed yesterday."

"Let me go home for some"—eagerly; "I sha'n't be a moment, and——"

"Nor for *worlds*!"—with unpleasant emphasis; "I would not give you so much trouble for anything. Do not go; I shall not use it if you do."

"Oh, if you will not," returns he, piqued, flushing darkly, "of course I shall not do what is unpleasant to you. Well, I shall not detain you longer: good-evening."

"In such a hurry to reach the Grange?" puts in she, quickly, childishly, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders.

"I am not going to the Grange, Georgie. Why do you speak to me like this?"

"I wonder I speak to you at all"—petulantly.

"So do I"—haughtily; "talking always makes a bad head worse. Forgive me that I have kept you standing so long. Again good-evening."

"Good-bye," returned she, with suppressed meaning.

"*Good-bye*? That is a dismissal," says he, bitterly.

He holds out his hand, and she places hers within it. The little fingers he clasps are dry and burning. He holds them closely, silently watching her face, which she has studiously turned from his. "At least accompany me to the gate," he says, in a changed voice, out of which all the *hauteur* had vanished, leaving only grief and regret behind it.

She makes no reply, but with her face still averted and her hand still clasped in his, moves beside him down the walk toward the gate.

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Just as they reach it a little sob smites upon his ear, and then he knows that she is crying.

“Georgie! Georgie! what is it?” exclaims he, in an agony, trying to meet her eyes; but with both her hands she has covered them very successfully.

“That horrible, odious, *detestable* Florence Blount!” she says presently; “oh, how miserable she has made me! But of course it is no wonder you should like her best; she is so tall and handsome, while I—I am only small and insignificant, and so—so young!”

“Georgie, let me——”

“I do not blame you. But why did you tell me a lie the other day, when you said you thought me prettier than she?”

“My darling! my angel!” says Mr. Dynecourt, taking her gently, gladly in his arms, “how can you be so foolish? Don’t you know every bit of heart I have is yours. And as to comparing you with that large, overgrown woman of the world, my beloved, I would not do you such a wrong.”

“Then it isn’t true? you are sure? you are certain?” asks Georgie, visibly brightening. “Then how *could* you go on as you did the other night, sitting near her, and talking to her, and looking into her eyes, and—and behaving so abominably in every way?”

“Let me explain,” entreats the young man, in a contrite tone; and then he does explain, and tells her all about that fatal rehearsal in the conservatory, and his despair and jealousy, and how he discovered his mistake and came up this evening to throw himself on her mercy, but was prevented by her coldness from making any explanation.

“Oh, how glad I am!” says Georgie, with a deep sigh of relief. And then she throws her arms around his neck in the fullness of her joy, and lays her soft curly head upon his chest. “Perhaps all has happened for the best,” she whispers, “because until that Tuesday night I never really knew how much I loved you. But now I know.”

“How do you know, Georgie?”

“You remember all you said to me that day long ago about people who were in love. I didn’t believe you then, but now I do. I know I should like to have you always near me”—with a little shy laugh, and an adorable blush; “and I should be dreadfully jealous if you liked any one better than me; and”—the smile fading and tears coming into her eyes—“if you were to die I know I should die too, because I couldn’t live without you.”

“My own darling!” says Dynecourt, in a low, unsteady voice, straining her to his heart.

[THE END.]

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**OUR BATTERY
CURES DEAFNESS**

AFTER ALL OTHER REMEDIES FAIL.

ACTINA CO., 88 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 473 Henry St., Brooklyn, N. Y., Dec. 3d, 1886.
Gentlemen:—In reply to your inquiry, I will say that I am pleased to state that your Battery has CURED MY DAUGHTER OF DEAFNESS AFTER ALL OTHER REMEDIES FAILED. Please send me another C. O. D.
GEO. RIGBY.

During the past years thousands of cases of Catarrh, Neuralgia, Headache, have been cured by our Battery; Cataracts have been removed by its use without surgical operation. We are sole owners and proprietors of U. S. Letters Patent covering our Battery.

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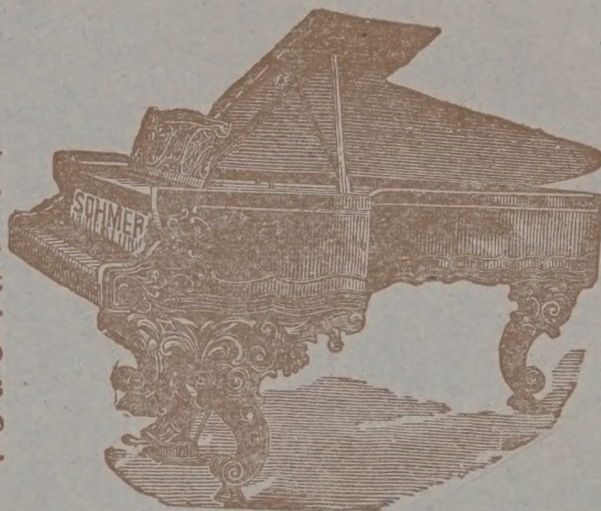
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