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A HOUSE OF CARDS.

(By Mrs. B. Lurie.)

CHAPTER IX.

"On one pretext or another which I told her to give as an excuse to her mother, I made her come to me at the office all of that week. I avoided as much as possible conversation of a lover-like nature. As long as I kept on neutral ground, she seemed less uneasy and was willing to talk quite freely. I gathered that although her environment was not favorable to the development of amiability, she had not allowed it to sour a naturally sweet and responsive disposition. She was passionately fond of good books and when vexed the most she tried to lose her worries in some classic. Her knowledge of literature was a surprise to me, as well as a constant source of delight.

"The following Monday she failed to put in an appearance. I was woefully disappointed. I telephoned to her house, but my call received no reply. I surmised she was not at home. Or else she knew instinctively I was ringing, so did not answer. At first, this made me angry. Then I speculated that maybe some untoward circumstance had arisen that made it impossible to come, or even answer my call. I thought of telephoning to her mother, but hesitated to do so for fear of arousing suspicion. So with what patience I could command, I waited till the next morning. I know she'd be home at an early hour. The ladies necessitated that. So a little before nine, I called her up. When she answered, I knew at once she was expecting this.

"Why didn't you come yesterday? I asked, without further parley.

"I thought it best to discontinue my visits, Mr. Clemens. We seem to be no nearer an understanding about Simon than we were two weeks ago. If there is anything further to be done in the matter, as I know there must be, please communicate with my mother. I will see to it that your letters receive the attention they require.

Her voice was harsh and constrained. I was very much startled.

"For heaven's sake, tell me what has occurred to change you so suddenly. Surely, I have done nothing. Don't you think I am entitled to an explanation?"

"I have no explanation to give. All I have to say is that I am very busy at home and cannot take any more time to come to your office. You said mama could pay for Simon on the installment plan, for which we are exceedingly grateful, but as for myself, I just cannot come."

"I am not satisfied with this explanation, and if you do not come to me at noon, I will be at your house this afternoon. I know there is something wrong and you must tell me what it is the matter."

"My throat curdled. She answered with less assurance: 'Please don't come. I will be at your office at noon.'

"I knew she would keep her word. When she came, I saw immediately that something was very wrong. With a tender solicitude to which she had become accustomed, I hastened to inquire into the nature of the trouble. At first she tried to evade answering direct, but on being pressed she blurted out: 'I have been to your house.'

"If a bomb had exploded at our feet, I could not have been more startled.

"To my house, Bess? When?" came from me in undisguised astonishment.

"Last Saturday, after I left here," she answered, quietly enough.

"Why did you do that?"

"I was seized with an uncontrollable desire to see what your family was like. When I got there, I was told by the maid who answered my ring that if I wished to see you on business I had better call at the office. I thanked her and left. But not before I had seen enough to make me feel lower than the lowest. In a beautiful room off the hall was the loveliest lady I had ever seen, and near her stood a handsome boy. They are your wife and son, are they not?"

"So completely taken by surprise was I that I could do no more than nod in the affirmative.

"She looked at me with eyes full of weep, as she said huskily: 'And with all that beautiful life away from here, with everything in the world to make your existence a veritable dream of joy, you wish me to understand that such as I has any attraction for you. My God! to think what a fool I have let you make of me! I suppose you have, in your own way, told your wife how much amusement your little Jewess was affording you! And she made no

objection, because I served her and your purpose. I acted as such a splendid foil for her superior attractions. Yes, yes, I see it all now. You are rich and the price you paid was not too much." This came from her in a torrent. In her face I could read mingled shame, grief and anger. I tried to take her hand, but she pushed me from her. I had never tried to touch her before, but thought nothing of it now till I felt her repulse. My voice betrayed my earnestness.

"Bess, Bess, for heaven's sake, don't take on so. Do believe me when I assure you my affection for you is sincere. My wife and I

means have you of ascertaining how true or false he is to you?"

"But she shook her head.

"I feel it, I know it. He has not your charm, your fascination. He lacks also your attractive and artistic temperament, but he is conscientious, practical, and in his own way considerate to a degree. Were I not a Jewess, even his family's relations towards his wife would be all that could be desired. They all object to me on the score of my religion. But I trust him implicitly."

"Her confidence in her husband was gall and wormwood to me. I longed for an opportunity



RABBI SAMUEL MARKS, OF SAN ANTONIO

Who will Address the Jewish Literary Society in Houston on January 18.

have very little in common. Our tastes are singularly dissimilar. A bridge party and a new gown are of far more importance to her than I am. She would no more take the time from the distractions of society to listen to me as you have done than she would sit down to table with her colored coachman. Don't be hard on me, my Queen Bess. You can't conceive what your presence here has meant to me. I have never mentioned it before, but I had straightened out Simon's trouble even the third day after I first saw you. I did it through the secret service man I employed to work on the case. I loved you even then, and did it all for your sake. But I was afraid to tell you for fear of losing my pretext for having you come here. Don't you understand and feel that I am telling you the truth? Believe me, if it were only possible, I would gladly lift you from the drudgery of your present existence. You know I can easily afford it. But I have so far been unable to think of a way that would accomplish this without exciting suspicion. The wild plan of somehow getting your husband into the firm suggested itself to me, but my common sense discarded it as unfeasible. So you can judge how much in earnest I am."

"I waited for her to speak. She shook her head and looked at me sadly. All her former buoyancy was gone. She said, dully, 'I thank you sincerely, but we have done wrong enough. To go on in this way is to further outrage both your and my conscience. Your wife may be very much occupied by interests unimportant to you, but I have no right to the place she fills to fill. As for my part, I confess no fraction of my offence. My husband's desires and tastes conflict with mine in many instances, still, I feel sure he would never dream of filling my place with interest in another.'"

"I seized on this argument as a drowning man catches at the proverbial straw. 'How can you tell that, Bess? What

to prove to her he was no better, morally, than I or the average run of men. All I said was:

"I am certainly glad that such is the case. For your own sake, I hope your confidence may never be shaken."

"She looked weary and spent. She spoke again, after a moment's pause. 'Don't think I am ungrateful for what you have done for us. I shall never forget it. But even you must admit that this cannot go on any longer. For the sake of appearances, we will have to go through the formality of drawing up notes for my mother and Simon to pay. That will wind this up satisfactorily and give no further excuse to neglect my children and come here.'

"Pleased as I would for her to reconsider her decision, I could not move her. The shock of seeing my wife seemed to have altered her attitude entirely. She displayed an inflexibility of purpose of which I little suspected her. She hid herself completely in hand. It looked as if she would stand her ground to the end, and all my hopes of retaining her regard would be frustrated. She was making ready to leave me. I barred the way.

"Surely, Bess, you ought to know I am not going to part from you thus. Look me straight in the face," I commanded. She averted her eyes. I placed a masterful hand on her shoulder and turned her round to me. I put the other hand under her chin and brought her eyes full on my face. I felt that at my touch her control was beginning to desert her. I tried to exert a hypnotic influence over her. I knew my power. 'Now, Bess,' (my voice no more than a dreamy whisper) 'can you say you do not love me?'

"A hunted look came into her eyes. But she was sufficiently mistress of herself to answer, evasively: 'I don't know.'

"I won't take that for an answer. Tell me Yes or No."

"I won't do it. Let me go."

UGHT A JEW, LOEB EXCLUDED FROM UNION LEAGUE CLUB.

William Loeb, Jr., collector of the Port of New York, has had his application for membership in the Union League Club rejected. One of the reasons assigned for the club's action was that he was supposed to be of Jewish ancestry. When he was told that Mr. Loeb said:

"But I am not a Jew, although I would be proud of it if I were. My father was a German-Lutheran and my mother a German Catholic. I am of pure German blood."

"All right, go. I am satisfied." With that I bent suddenly and kissed her—a liberty I had not dreamed of venturing on before, only that now I felt my justification lay in the fact that I know she loved me, and that I, in all probability, was seeing her for the last time. She was covered with confusion, and left the office even without bidding me good-bys.

CHAPTER X.

"Next day I rang her up and told her, as if nothing had happened, that I was coming over. She said she would not be at home. Then I begged her to come to the office. This she refused to consider.

"Then I tried another tack. 'Suppose I drop in on you without warning, what will you do then?'

"I'd have to let you think I wasn't in," she answered promptly.

"Now, Bess, you know I don't deserve this at your hands. Don't you think you are unnecessarily hurt? My tone was aggrieved. Never before had I been put in such a humiliating position.

"I must be hard in order to protect both our interests. You know why I am acting this way, and your conscience justifies me. 'That's where you are mistaken. I want to see you so much that I swear I don't care a rap for conscience or anything else. At least let me send you some little token of esteem.'

"Mr. Clemens, that is out of the question. I am too much in debt to you already. It would be foolish to add to the burden of obligation I am under."

"Your attitude causes me grief. I consider you are in no debt to me. It is all on the other side, were the truth told. You were saying something about your birthday falling some time next month. Can I have your promise that I might send you some trifle on that day? 'How could you do it without getting me into trouble?'

"That's right, too. But suppose I send you some jeweled article and you pretend you found it?'

"No, Mr. Clemens," came the reply, with decision. "It is best not. We are in the wrong enough, without going in further."

"I certainly consider your treatment of me unjust. You give me no opportunity to show you how thoroughly I appreciate you."

"You have demonstrated it enough in the kind manner you are treating Simon. You have earned our lasting gratitude."

"But your conduct is a very poor token of gratitude."

"Nevertheless, I am exceedingly grateful, Mr. Clemens."

"I was thoroughly impatient, and exclaimed, 'O, don't call me Mr. Clemens. Your boy's name is Robert, so you ought not to find it awkward to call me by my Christian name once in a while.'

"She seemed to hesitate a moment, and her answer came slowly: 'The time for that, Mr. Clemens, we must now consider past. Later you will thank me for remaining firm.'

"That day will never come. I will live on in the hope of changing your mind. I believe in mental influences. I have you so constantly in my thoughts that I will yet win the right from you to love you."

"I hardly know how to answer you, Mr. Clemens. Your regard touches me deeply. I am indeed grateful, believe me."

(To be continued.)