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A CHARMING NOVELETTE. ONLY FOR THE SEASON.

CHAPTER I.—DR. SECKER MAKES A PROFESSIONAL VISIT.

The twilight was past, the stars had come out, and a smart March wind shook the tree-tops in the avenue leading to Dykeham, the residence of Sir Francis Crevillon, Baronet.

Dr. Carl Secker drew in his horse before the lodge-gate, and looked down at the woman who opened it with a face expressive of dissatisfaction. He had seen moving lights, like carriage lamps, amongst the trees and heard the rumble of wheels in the drive before him.

"Stop a moment," cried Dr. Secker. "Is there—is anything unusual going on at the Hall?"

"No, sir; only a dinner-party, I believe."

"Oh," said Dr. Secker, passing on into the drive with speculative slowness. If Sir Francis was about to entertain dinner-guests, he had come on a vain errand, and might almost as well turn back. So it appeared at first sight, or so he made believe that it appeared; but he went on for all that, in the rear of the carriages, watching the lights as they vanished behind big trees, and came twinkling into sight again.

"If they had as many starlight rides to take as I have," mused the doctor, "they would learn to do without lamps such a night as this. Well, I think I had better go on. I think I ought to go professionally. A busy man can't choose his own time for visiting a patient."

He quickened his pace a little, for if he did go on, it was important that he should reach the house before the guests were assembled. He passed a carriage or two, saw a gentleman in black, and had a vision of a white cloud of muslin and lace, and a coronet that glittered like silver. Then a groom took his horse, and he sprang up the steps and became the prey of the first official receiver, whose duty it was to hand him over to the second official receiver, who would relieve him of his coat.

"No," objected the doctor, brusquely, for he did not much like being mistaken for an invited guest; "show me into a morning room, if you please, and inquire if Miss Crevillon will see me. I shall detain her but a few moments."

He was shown into a morning room, accordingly, and took up his position on the hearth-rug, after the fashion of English gentlemen in general. While he waited, it occurred to him that his heart was beating a little faster than usual, and that he could not be said to retain that evenness of spirit and nerve which are essential to a medical man in his visits to his patients. A certain sensation of doubt oppressed him as to the propriety of this step which he had taken; also a little haze of unreality began to rise about the position in which he had believed himself to be placed when he mounted his horse to ride to Dykeham. He couldn't possibly have dreamed it, he supposed. And after all, what had dinner-parties, or, indeed, any arrangements at Dykeham, to do with the discharge of his professional duties? As all the world knew, his time could not be called his own, and he must pay his visits as he could.

The vision which appeared to him when the door opened would, however, scarcely have been suspected of requiring medical aid. It was a cloud of white, something like that other vision which he had just before seen through a carriage window, only the first was totally uninteresting to him, whilst this one—

"He made a step or two forwards and then stopped. "Amy!" he said, in a tone not professional. "Oh, Carl! I ought not to have come, I stole away without their knowledge. If Lady Crevillon were to know, or Joanna—"

"Or Sir Francis," added the doctor. "He would hardly object to your seeing me, Amy. You forget—"

"No, I do not. But you never meant to see Sir Francis this evening."

"Indeed, I did."

"Well, you'll find it to be impossible. And, Carl, I tried to tell Joanna, but she was so hard and dry that I couldn't do it."

Dr. Secker was standing in the exact spot to which he had advanced to meet her; and he was looking down upon the carpet with a troubled expression.

"Shall I write to Sir Francis, Amy? I feel underhanded."

"And the Hunt Ball to-morrow night," said the doctor, aghast. "You! only within the last month able to walk without assistance!"

"Stop, Carl. I want you to tell me—as my medical adviser, you know, not my—my lover—do you really think I ought not to go to balls?"

Dr. Secker hesitated. The face that looked up into his own was so childlike in its questioning; so simply in earnest about his opinion; so divested of its usual wilfulness and occasional petulance, that he felt obliged to question himself according to her distinctions, as the doctor, and not the lover.

"I think dissipation bad for any one; for you, dangerous. A ball, occasionally, is not dissipation; but just at present, when I tremble sometimes to think that your recovery is hardly assured—"

"That will do. I love balls, but—"

"You love me better," said the doctor. "I begin to believe that I have not dreamed it all. You won't tire yourself to-night, Amy? Is it a large party?"

"Stupidly large. Don't you wish you were going to stay and—"

She broke off abruptly. Something in the young doctor's face made her fear lest the words might hurt him, either in his pride or his self-consciousness, about this secret which Sir Francis did not yet suspect. She fancied that his aspect had changed; that it was less glad and assured; and so again she laid her hand upon the arms that were crossed in front of her.

"Oh, Carl! Carlo mio! never be hurt at anything I may say in my foolishness. Know better what I mean."

And then the doctor smiled down upon her, and uncrossed his arms, letting one of them draw her to him. He thought of something else just then, which was not exactly pleasant to him; he thought of other arms which might rest in wait or gallop, where his own was resting; only how differently! How much less reverential, how carelessly indifferent they would be! He wished a passing wish, which others had felt before him, with reference to such dances, but he did not give it words.

"I must go now," said Amy. "Good-bye, Carl."

When he was gone, she listened a little while, and then went to the window to raise a corner of the curtain and blind, that she might see him ride off. She said to herself, once again, very softly, "Carlo mio!" and then the curtain dropped over the window, and she ran up stairs to steal into the drawing-room and be taken into dinner. But as she passed Lady Crevillon, my lady turned round and looked at her, and Amy knew that there would be no longer any secret to keep.

She behaved very well to her neighbors at the dinner-table. She answered their remarks, smiled when it was expected of her, looked with seeming interest through the glittering liver and the lustrous flowers and ferns at the row of faces opposite to her, but all the while she was thinking what she would have to say to Sir Francis by-and-by.

When they were in the drawing-room again Amy saw, without seeming to look at it, the approach of Lady Crevillon's skirt as it swept the carpet and passed at her feet.

"Was Dr. Secker here before dinner?" said her ladyship.

"Yes."

"He came to see you, I suppose. I thought he considered your health re-established. Such an hour, too, to come!"

"I dare say he had been busy all day."

Lady Crevillon made a grimace, signifying how extremely unimportant Dr. Secker and his business were in her eyes.

"He should have come before, if he must come. What did he say?"

Amy looked straight up at the gold eye-glass, by the help of which her ladyship was making observations.

"I am not going to tell you, Lady Crevillon," she replied. "I shall tell Sir Francis; but I don't think this is the time to talk about it."

Lady Crevillon smiled, nodded and passed on. She rather relished that bold speech of Amy's, it showed spirit. But if Dr. Secker could have known, as he rode home in the starlight, the sublime contempt with which her ladyship mentally closed upon him the doors of Dykeham, he might have been still less at ease in his own mind than he was already. If he had thought the matter over, it might have occurred to him before that the baronet would be ready enough to measure the difference between his social standing and Miss Crevillon's. He had, perhaps, perceived this in some vague, general way, without attaching much importance to it; but somehow his ride to-night through Dykeham Park, with the carriages before him, seemed to have went into his own room—that is, the room in which he generally sat—a sudden chill came over him. It was dingy; no question about that. There was a general air of dreariness about it which annoyed him. Some months ago it had been comfortable enough; but since then he had been called up, much to his own amazement, by Sir Francis Crevillon, to pre-

scribe for that gentleman's ward and distant relative, who was considered a confirmed invalid. Dr. Secker had dispersed that theory; but then he had also fallen in love, and now he began to think that he had done a very mad thing. He looked at the easy chair, covered with dingy Morocco, opposite to him, and he found it impossible to place there, even in imagination, the dainty form he had seen in the morning room at Dykeham. He could think of her there, but here she was incongruous. The doctor's heart sank.

"I wish I was a rich man," he said. "I wish the Seckers—"

And he broke off. "No, I don't; I wish to be nothing but what I am. As to this room which annoys me, all that can be changed—shall be changed if—"

CHAPTER II.
THE MEET AT REDFORD BRIDGE.

"If you remember," said Lady Crevillon, "I was always against his being called in. Dr. Guise has been the family physician long enough to be trusted, one would think."

"Only Guise didn't cure Amy," replied Sir Francis, drily.

"How could he? She was taken out of his hands. I dare say, if the truth could be known, it was he who did the real good."

"Scarcely fair to Dr. Secker, Lady Crevillon."

"Tell Joanna my life is more valuable to me than it ever was," she answered. "Never mind about understanding it. Frank, tell her that."

"Do you think I'm a baby?" retorted the boy, nodding. "But if I were you I'd be ill again, and then Secker would have to come. Mind, I don't say you are to do it, but I should. Secker gave me a jolly good gallop on his bay mare yesterday; and he's got the primest fishing-rod you ever saw."

"Any walked on into the park, and reached a spot where a clump of ash trees partially hid the Dykeham chimneys. She wanted to be out of sight and sound of the house below; to get away from all memory of those jarring voices, with their calm decisions and phlegmatic platitudes. What did they know about it, any of them? What did Joanna, who was young, and ought to know, feel in that dull, passive heart of hers?"

"If you get ill you'll have to be nursed." That was all they cared for her, any of them. She did not complain of that; she did not want them to care now. Only, when there was one who did care why must they set their faces against him, and talk about seeing the world? She wanted nothing more out of the world than had been given to her—one heart out of it all for her own.

A clock in the ungainly tower which marked the Dykeham stables struck ten, and she started up with a sudden recollection that eleven was the hour for the meet at Redford Bridge, and she had told Carl she should be there. And she had to go back to the house and dress.

"Which shall I do," she reflected, "in just ten minutes. I must go after saying I should. He might be there."

She did not consider how very improbable it was that the doctor would have any time to spare for such a purpose. She knew, indeed, as a general fact, that he was busy from morning till night; but she did not apply the knowledge in this case.

No one made any remark when she went downstairs dressed to go with Lady Crevillon and Joanna. They seemed to take it as a matter of course that this little affair was of no consequence—a trifle which would blow over and make no difference. The less said about it the better.

"If Dr. Secker makes a formal application to you," said Lady Crevillon, "of course you will decidedly refuse your consent."

Sir Francis bit his lip. He was fond of considering himself totally unbiased by his wife, and dependent only on his own judgment. He said, briefly, "I shall think about it. Too violent an opposition would be as foolish as complacency."

And the subject was dropped. He rode down to the Meet beside his wife's carriage, very silent the whole time, looking at Amy occasionally with some faint stirring of pity and sympathy coming up from under the weight of years and going forth towards her. This young doctor was a fine, generous fellow; there could be no doubt about that; and then he came of a good family. As to his generosity, ask the starving poor, who huddled together in the back-slums and alleys of Redford. As a magistrate, and chairman of the Board of Guardians at the Redford Union, Sir Francis knew a little more of these miserable paupers than his wife did, and of the doctor who never refused to help them, and never asked a fee from those who could not afford to give it.

Did Amy really care very much for him? Would it hurt her to give him up. Did she care as much as he, the baronet, had cared years ago, when— "Fish!" ejaculated Sir Francis, fretfully; "what's the use of that?"

It did not look like being unhappy, he thought, to come of her own free will to see the hounds throw off. She should go with him and Lady Crevillon up to town, and that would shake it all off, if he knew anything of a girl's nature. When they reached the bridge and stood amongst a crowd of other carriages, men in red coats and men in black coats, ready mounted, and a pack of motley followers on foot out of the town, Sir Francis went to Amy's side and spoke good humoredly.

"If the carriage follows far enough you'll see one or two of those ladies take the fence up at Pecket's withy-bed in gallant style. Don't you wish you were mounted?"

"No, Sir Francis."

The baronet turned away disappointed. He wanted to forget all that little morning scene, and to get over the effects of it, and Amy's respectfully antagonistic reply vexed him. Nevertheless he told the coachman to keep up with the others as far as Pecket's withy-bed; and Amy did see one or two ladies take the fence, from which sight she turned away uttering a single word of disapproval, which might perhaps be partially due to her disappointment in not having seen anything of Dr. Secker.

"It's what I never could do in my life," said Joanna, bending forward with some show of eagerness. "But those girls are more at home in the hunting-field than the ball-room. Their costume last night was absurd in the extreme. We shall see what sort of figure they cut at luncheon."

"In my young days," said Lady Crevillon, "I could have taken such a fence as that my self; but I seldom did it. I don't think fast young ladies were admired in those days. Now we had better go home; there's never any run to speak of here, even if they find, which is doubtful, and I should like to be comfortably at home before the people begin to come back."

It was some time after this that Dr. Secker, riding slowly up the road towards Redford, saw the carriages turn one after another into the Dykeham drive, and could not help stopping to look after them. He scanned the scarlet cloaks, the black hats with their tiny white feathers, the tiger-skin rugs and the heraldic devices with an unquiet mind. It was not altogether that he had thought to find Amy Crevillon amongst them and failed. The contrast which all this presented to himself on his faded horse, himself worn out and hungry, and the commonplace home, with its commonplace appliances, to which he was going, pressed upon him uncomfortably. What had he done? What would the world, at least its representatives in this neighborhood, say he had done? They talked of Miss Crevillon as an heiress. That the supposition was as likely to be false as true he believed. He cared nothing about it, but then who would believe that of him?

He turned away from the Dykeham lodge and passed on. He went home and ate his dinner drearily, wondering if Amy had told Sir Francis, and if so, what had Sir Francis said; and lastly, what would Sir Francis say to a letter which was even then in course of completion in the young man's mind?

CHAPTER III.
THE FENCE-MARK MOON.

It shone already in the evening sky, while the departing sun scattered tints of gold and purple over the earth, and threw long shadows down from the trees in the Dykeham shrubbery.

For a whole month until now Dr. Secker had seen Amy but once, and that once accidentally. Coming out of that region in the town of Redford which was called emphatically the Irish quarter, Carl, emerging and dally into one of the broader streets, saw the dark-blue panels of the Dykeham carriage as it drove past. He saw also a quick, inquisitive, and openly eager recognition of himself as he stood in that dark opening which led to the Irish quarter, and he forgot all the misery he had left behind him to follow in his thoughts that carriage up the Dykeham drive. He had seen her, and had been recognized. It was odd, he thought, that his sense of contrast should so pertinaciously trouble him. There was something false about it, he knew, some thing which would not bear analysis. Only, the thing was, had he been wise and right to bring Amy down from this luxurious life of hers? Was it right of him to wish that she could share his anxieties and cares as well as his joys? Dr. Secker could not answer the question to his own satisfaction. If he had been less thoughtful and clear-sighted he might have said, "She shall never know anything but joy; my cars I will keep from her"; but he knew better than to say so, or to think so.

Since that meeting in Redford, however, the aspect of affairs had changed a little. The doctor had got his answer from Sir Francis, and found himself hardly able to comprehend his own position. Sir Francis represented himself as standing in the place of Amy's father. He could not give his consent to his ward's entering into any such engagement as the one Dr. Secker did her the honor to propose—at present. He considered that she was very young—too young, indeed, to know her own mind. He required that she should see a little more of the world before entering into one of those rash compact which young people are so ready to make and so apt to regret. He did not wish to be tyrannical; so far as he could see there was no need for any violent rupture between his ward and Dr. Secker. Such things were always remarked upon and productive of mischievous gossip. He thought it better, however, that they should not meet often just at present; and then Sir Francis prosed a little and finished off, leaving the doctor in a hopeless maze of uncertainty and confusion. It seemed to him that the whole thing was treated in the slightest possible way, as an affair of no importance, which was, in fact, exactly the view Sir Francis wished to be taken of it. He did not wish to oppose his ward with any strength of entreaty or command; it would, he thought, be both troublesome and productive of harm instead of good; and as he meant to remove her from the doctor's neighborhood, there was no need absolutely to forbid their meeting at present.

But the doctor did not wait to be forbidden; he would not go to Dykeham to put himself in the way of being insulted by Lady Crevillon or her husband. His resolution might have failed him, the fever of indignation and pride into which he had worked himself might not have been strong enough to keep him away when he heard about the town journey; but before he did hear of it chance favored him. He saw Amy at the Dykeham lodge in passing, and then all his anger, and pride, and self-torment fled away, and in another moment he was walking up the drive with her. He would do nothing underhanded; if he met her and spoke to her they should know that