

[From The Evening News.]
MY FIRST DINNER PARTY.
(CONTINUED.)

"I think she seems very heartless," I replied; "but that is no business of mine."

At this moment our hostess came up to me, and said to her son.
"Harry, you must take in Lady Falkner, remember!"

"Excuse me, mother, I mean to take Mabel instead; it is her right as the greatest stranger."

"How can you be so absurd?" said his mother contemptuously. "Mabel is but a child, and will not wish, I am sure, to push herself forward so conspicuously. Besides, as her coming was doubtful, I had made my arrangements without her. You will not object, so go down the last with me, will you?"

"O, no; I had much rather," I answered eagerly, only longing to be as far as possible from the strange Mrs. Harry.

"You are exceedingly complimentary to my fair son," said he; "but I am accustomed to have my own way. So, mother, we will make a compromise; I will take down Mabel and Lady Falkner."

"I wish I might stay up here while you have dinner; I am not at all hungry," said I, making one more effort to save myself.

"Certainly, if you prefer it," said Mrs. Dalton. "I dare say you are fatigued after your journey."

"Excuse me, mother!" interposed her son, "I am fatigued, but the length of an all night journey is no excuse for a dinner announced. Lady Falkner, may I have the honor? Come Mabel."

And before I had time to make further objection, my hand was drawn with him, and when during the repast, after dish was brought me in startling rapidity, all my former bewilderment seemed as nothing, and I could only conclude that Lady Falkner had been at work, and that this was the veritable feast prepared for the Princess Badroulboudour, of which I had read in my one book of fairy stories at home.

Happily for me, my host was pretty well occupied with the dinner, and I proved to be a very talkative old lady, so I was left for a time in peace, and had drifted completely away into fairy-land, till suddenly recalled by the loud clatter of a glass, and the cry, "A penny for your thoughts, my fair cousin! Apparently you prefer them to your dinner; you absolutely eat nothing."

Determined to try and break through the spell of unreality that surrounded me, I looked up into his face, and said, with a feeling of compunction for contradicting his brain-weak father, "I am very sorry, but I am no relation of yours."

"What you won't own me, then? This is hard, when I am so anxious to be friends," I suspected somebody had been poisoning your mind against me; the mischievous old aunt, perchance."

Here was a puzzling position. I could not tell a lie; but it might be dangerous to anger him. How clever he was, too, to divine the truth at once! However, I had often heard that crony people were particularly cunning. He was waiting for my reply, and I felt the tall-tale blush spread over my face.

It was no good delaying, I must say something; so feeling confused, I hung my head, and said as gently as I could, "A very sorry, indeed I am. It is your misfortune, not your fault."

"Do you believe all the tales that old crones tell you?" he asked angrily.

I looked up at him for a moment, and noting the angry flash of his dark eyes and the flash on his brow, began to feel that I had unintentionally aroused the violent part of his nature, and that if I were not careful the whole would be a scene. What could I say to soothe him?

"You must not look like that; you frighten me," I said at last. "I did not mean to offend you."

"Offend me? Pah!" he answered, in the same harsh, angry tone. "You are footing on which we should stand. But you are rather a severe monitor, Miss Mabel, for one so young; and, to tell the truth, I have not been accustomed to either reproach or pity heretofore."

"Haven't you? How sad!" I said. "People like you are more to be pitied than any one else, I think."

"Really," he exclaimed, raising his handsome eyebrows, "that is a new view of my case. I am generally considered rather an object of envy than pity, considering the many unlucky mortals there are in this wretched world. I suspect my former monitor, Hugh Spencer, for instance, would gladly change places with me."

"O no, I am sure he wouldn't!" I exclaimed eagerly, thinking of my dear clear-headed father in his cozy though humble vicarage.

"Do you think the picture I drew of him just now an enviable one? Harmony on 3000 a year and a house full of children?"

"Yes," said I, transported in thought to my cheerful home, "the happiest in the world."

There was an amused smile on his face as he said:
"I am glad to hear my cousin's views of life so clearly expressed."

What there was to be amused at I could not tell, and was heartily glad that the dinner party in a restaurant at this juncture, and engrossed the attention of my most inexpressible host for the remainder of the ladies' sojourn at the table.

How relieved I felt when the door closed behind us, and I was once more free from the mingled fear and fascination I felt under the gaze of those handsome dark eyes of Sir Harry's.

To be continued.

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