

THE GEM AND ITS SETTING.

PERSONS.

EVE GRIEVE, 30, a widow.

MAY DAY, 18, an unmarried girl.

JAMES KNIGHT, 40, a bachelor.

A RECEPTIVE FRIEND.

Scene:—*Mrs. Grieve's drawing-room at Chelsea. It is 5 o'clock.
She is giving a small tea-party*

MAY DAY (*to her hostess in passing*): Why, Eve, you have got a new gaud?

MRS. GRIEVE (*touching her neck*): Oh, this old thing? I have had it years.

MAY DAY: A month, perhaps! Bend down.

MRS. GRIEVE (*bending down, while her friend grasps the pendant*): Oh, well, it's all the same. Isn't it a nice little bit of paste?

MAY DAY (*incredulously*): No—surely?

MRS. GRIEVE (*laughing*): Let go May, you are strangling me! Yes, it's wonderful how effective really antique paste is. Poor old Jimmy! (*She leaves her to speak to another guest.*)

MAY DAY (*half to herself, and half to a receptive friend*): Poor old Jimmy, indeed! Paste, did he? I must stop on and have a straight talk to a young woman—Eve. Eve is playing, but it isn't cricket! And why isn't poor old Jimmy here to grace, or disgrace her triumph? (*She propounds this query in so many words to Mr. Grieves as that lady drifts past her a second time.*)

MRS. GRIEVE: Kept at the office, dear. Will look in later if he can manage it. I asked him, at all events (*defiantly*).

MAY DAY: It is the least you could do.

MRS. GRIEVE (*amiably*): Stop and see him if he comes. I shall soon get rid of all these people. Don't go till you have to!

MAY DAY (*solemnly*): I will stay, even if I have to miss the Delmar dinner for it, and Teddy is to be there!

THE RECEPTIVE FRIEND: Who is Teddy?

MAY DAY (*shortly*): The young man I want to be engaged to, and yet I am going to sit tight.

(*She does. Mrs. Grieve gets gradually rid of all her friends, and the room is empty. They both go to the tea-table and eat little cakes. Mr. James Knight has not appeared.*)

MAY DAY (*with her mouth full*): Now, Eve, I am going to scold you. Let us go and sit by the fire.

MRS. GRIEVE (*drawing up two chairs*): The solemn cheek of it!

MAY DAY: I assume the privilege of youth. How

your jewel flashes in the firelight !

MRS. GRIEVE : How you do keep harping on my wretched jewel ! (*boldly.*) It isn't the first Jimmy has given me by a very long way.

MAY DAY : I know it isn't. More shame for you !

MRS. GRIEVE : May, I shall get cross, I warn you. Flesh and blood can't be expected to stand it.

MAY DAY : Silk and chiffon, you mean ! I don't believe, my dear, that you have more body than chiffon or less dressing than silk ?

MRS. GRIEVE : Very neat ! And you judge I have no heart because I like pretty clothes and things that sparkle, and because I choose to wear some little bits of mere brightness that have no intrinsic value except—

MAY DAY : Don't pretend that you attach sentimental interest to these—sparklets. Everyone knows that Jimmy leaves you absolutely cold.

MRS. GRIEVE : He does, poor fellow. I can't help it.

MAY DAY : While you have the reverse effect upon him. Everyone knows that, too. It's humiliating ! I *am* sorry for him.

MRS. GRIEVE (*with feeling*). So am I.

MAY DAY : How insulting ! How dare you be sorry for a man worth two of you !

MRS. GRIEVE : That's not rating him over highly.

MAY DAY : Tell me one thing. You have refused him, conventionally, I suppose ?

MRS. GRIEVE: Very conventionally, once for all.

MAY DAY: And does he believe you?

MRS. GRIEVE: Oh yes. It is only on that understanding that I permit—

MAY DAY: Paste pendants, etc.

MRS. GRIEVE: It gives him such intense pleasure, poor dear, and you know, you impertinent May, who presume to know everything, that Jimmy ins't at all badly off. He has quite a comfortable salary from those people in Throgmorton Street, and I always say that he is not to spend more than a fiver on me, ever. I am adamant.

MAY DAY: That pendant isn't. I am sure it cost more than a fiver.

MRS. GRIEVE: Nonsense! Jimmy knows that I am a woman of honour.

MAY DAY: Did you make him swear to the fiver?

MRS. GRIEVE: Of course not. Jimmy is a man of honour too.

MAY DAY: Oh, love makes short work of honour! You have corrupted him and got him to salve your nasty little conscience with a lie.

MRS. GRIEVE: I wouldn't stand this from any one but an unmarried girl.

MAY DAY: They only have the courage to do and dare to be rude. I am going on, since you are so nice about it. Eve, don't you mean to marry again?

MRS. GRIEVE: I don't mean to, but I may.

MAY DAY: Not Jimmy?

MRS. GRIEVE: Certainly, not Jimmy.

MAY DAY: He is far too good for you.

MRS. GRIEVE: Far. But honestly, since my widowhood I have seen no one I could marry again, marry once even. That's my position, and I think it is a tenable one.

MAY DAY (*pensive*): Oh yes, if you can hold it. When I think how I adore Teddy, who won't even give me the chance of marrying once, I could shake you.

MRS. GRIEVE: Do, child, if you think it would help you to Teddy. But why won't you let me stay in the berth to which Providence has called me—the delightful berth of a widow, with enough money to be comfortable, and ornamental too. Neither my features nor my housekeeping are considered plain. I have, thank God, no relations and heaps of friends.

MAY DAY: Enough to furnish your drawing-room and eat your delicious little cakes, but only one Jimmy.

MRS. GRIEVE: But Jimmys are not rare. Every ordinarily nice woman has a Jimmy of sorts, as she has an opera-glass or a marabout stole.

MAY DAY: "A poor thing, but mine own."

MRS. GRIEVE: It can't be helped. There are, moving in this society of ours, a certain number of women whom everybody—

MAY DAY: Draw it mild.

MRS. GRIEVE: Well, that several men want. Then, as a pendant to them (*May Day glances sarcastically at Mrs.*

Grieve's neck, and Mrs. Grieve unconsciously puts her hand up), we have a certain number of men whom no woman wants. "Left overs!" Jimmy is the sort of man who is born to be said No to.

MAY DAY: Not when he comes with his hands full.

MRS. GRIEVE: Of two-pence-halfpenny perhaps.

MAY DAY: Oh, that's what five pounds has dwindled to!

MRS. GRIEVE: It is no fault of his that he is not magnetic.

MAY DAY: He has beautiful eyes, like a faithful dog's.

MRS. GRIEVE: Just the sort of eye that doesn't count— with women.

MAY DAY: He is an awfully good sort.

MRS. GRIEVE: That goes without saying—and without magnetism either! Virtue doesn't pay with widows. I don't know about girls? *Re* Teddy? (*May blushes*); Is *he* particularly good? I heard tales—! And have you ever observed that Circe had to turn her men into beasts before she would look at them?

MAY DAY: Beasts are faithful, at any rate.

MRS. GRIEVE: But men were, and should be, deceivers ever. It suits them. What of Teddy?

MAY DAY: Drop Teddy. Then why, if Jimmy is so dull, do you go to tea with him at his rooms and other places? Aren't you afraid of being compromised?

MRS. GRIEVE (*laughs*): Jimmy! Compromising!

MAY DAY: Why not, as well as another?

MRS. GRIEVE: He squints, he lisps, he is bow-legged, and he'd be red haired if he wasn't bald. One could go to his rooms on a season ticket, and no one think it was anything but an errand of mercy! Would you marry him yourself?

MAY DAY (*hesitates*): No—er—I—he is not in love with *me*.

MRS. GRIEVE (*bitterly*): You see! And yet that being the case, he has some faint chance of being amusing with you. There's the situation in a nutshell. (*The clock strikes six*). Poor Jimmy! He has been hopelessly kept. And I put on his pendant on purpose to please him. I am very fond of Jimmy you know, though not like *that*. Why, the very way he comes into a room sets all the wrong nerves vibrating.

MAY DAY (*curious*): How does he come into a room.

MRS. GRIEVE: The wrong way! I can't describe it. Deprecating, dubious, obsequious, as if he didn't see where he was going—no dash or virility about it.

MAY DAY: How can he dash when he knows he won't be appreciated where he is going?

“How can it, oh how can Love's eye see true

That is so worn with watching and with tears?”

Of course, he has no spirit. You have killed it. He is afraid of you.

MRS. GRIEVE: I always know exactly what he will do next.

MAY DAY: But you may depend upon it, it will be the right thing.

MRS. GRIEVE : There are so many ways of doing the right thing. There's his way, the commonplace gentlemanly, grovelling, unadventurous, unspeculative way. Now if I heard of one unexpected, daring, dashing, romantic, masterful thing he had done for me, or against me, it doesn't matter which, I believe it would work wonders with the impressionable, modern creature that I am.

MAY DAY : Yes, you are a very widow. Well, I am going to tell you of a deed such as you describe. I have guessed it. Jimmy hasn't let on to anyone. But I have known it for a very long time.

MRS. GRIEVE : What ?

MAY DAY : That pendant you are wearing is not paste, it is diamonds. So is the brooch you wore at the Delmars the other night. Teddy noticed that. He said he'd bet his life that never came out of Wardour Street. Jimmy likes you to believe that he is always interviewing Jews in the Rue de Douai, or the back streets of Amsterdam. Not at all, he buys things new in Bond Street, and dips them in something to make them look old? You have taught him to cheat you. It is a gigantic system of fraud, practised on you, Eve. He spends a very fair half of his income, as I guess, on decking out a woman who makes fun of him, teases him, and pities him! He need not work hard, but he does, you admit it. Why should he slave, except to earn the "over" that pays for your pleasure, you, who flout and jeer at him? I am convinced of this, and so is Teddy, who knows something about stones.

MRS. GRIEVE (*sneers*): And hasn't it brought you together—a common interest of abusing me?

MAY DAY: We don't talk of you, but of James Knight, a true knight if ever there was one, tricking out his lady like an idol, and the idol thinks she is being adorned with cut glass and tinsel, and tells her votary to turn his toes out, and wipe his muddy boots in the hall before he comes into her presence.

MRS. GRIEVE: Jimmy may be the best of men, but he is terribly slovenly, and I am desperately neat.

MAY DAY: Pooh! Do you remember my asking you to lend me your brooch for a fancy dress party, a month or two ago? You agreed, you are generous enough. I didn't wear it, but took the opportunity of confounding you. I gave it to a jeweller and had it valued.

MRS. GRIEVE (*in a husky voice*): Well?

MAY DAY: Diamonds, rather yellow, but worth at least a couple of hundred. One jeweller offered me eighty for them. And that lump you wear on a chain—

MRS. GRIEVE: That is nothing particular—a Russian pebble; an Alexandrite they call it.

MAY DAY: Very difficult to get, and *most* costly. How easily people are taken in when they want to be! (*The outer bell rings.*) James!

MRS. GRIEVE: Do you mind leaving us?

MAY DAY: Certainly, with the greatest of pleasure!

(*She goes. Mr. Knight is announced.*)

JAMES KNIGHT: I am sorry. I could not get here

sooner. (*He sinks rather wearily into the chair that May Day has just vacated, leaving a trail of muddy boot in his passage thereto.*)

MRS. GRIEVE : Some tea, Jimmy ?

JAMES KNIGHT (*deprecatingly*) : I am too late !

MRS. GRIEVE (*softly*) : Not at all. I'll have some fresh made. (*She contrives to put a chair over the worst boot mark.*) Have you had a hard day ?

JAMES KNIGHT : Rather. But one must grind to keep up at all. Have you had a successful reception ?

MRS. GRIEVE : As successful as it could possibly be without you.

JAMES KNIGHT (*looking up, surprised, and suspicious of these new amenities*) : Oh, I should hardly have added to the general hilarity. I'm growing a sad bear.

MRS. GRIEVE : Say a melancholy Jacques. Why do you always take such a gloomy view of life ?

JAMES KNIGHT (*stung into plainness*) : Because you won't marry me, dear Eve !

(*The servant comes in with tea, he helps himself to milk and sugar, The servant departs.*)

Let us talk of something and someone else. I met your little friend May Day in the hall as I came in. She looks remarkably chirpy, and gave me such an amiable greeting. Is her small love affair coming out all right ?

MRS. GRIEVE : May ? Oh, I forgot, she has a hopeless passion, too ! (*Bites her lip.*) No, she hasn't been talking of

herself for a wonder, she has been talking about you.

JAMES KNIGHT (*with the honest amazement of a modest man*): About me? She might find a more lively topic to bore you with.

MRS. GRIEVE: She says you—Jimmy, I am such a careless idiot, I have been and gone and lost the Alexandrim-Archimandrite, whatever it is—you gave me. At least, I can't find it anywhere?

JAMES KNIGHT (*smiling indulgently*): Have you looked in the tea-caddy?

MRS. GRIEVE: Yes, and in the coal-scuttle. Does it much matter?

JAMES KNIGHT: No, I'll soon get you another.

MRS. GRIEVE: You must not.

JAMES KNIGHT: Why not? It is good of you to lose it and give me the pleasure of getting you a new one.

MRS. GRIEVE: James, you are not to spend any more money on me.

JAMES KNIGHT: Why not, surely? It is the only—the best pleasure I have. I have no one else to give presents to, no one else to think of!

MRS. GRIEVE: May Day says I am a mean—

JAMES KNIGHT (*hotly*): May Day had better mind her own business.

MRS. GRIEVE: But I do think I am a cad, James.

JAMES KNIGHT: No, you are an angel, I think!

MRS. GRIEVE: An angel, with a reservation! But still.

if what May says is true—.

JAMES KNIGHT : What does she say ?

MRS. GRIEVE : She says that I am covered, from head to foot, like an idol, with perfectly priceless gems, *your* gift ! How funny ? (*She stares at Mr. Knight*.)

JAMES KNIGHT (*roughly*) : Why do you look at me so ?

MRS. GRIEVE : Because I see that when a man is upset he turns red, not white, as we women do.

JAMES KNIGHT : Never mind my colour, Eve, or the state of my banking account either ! I wish you had not started this. (*Wipes his forehead*.)

MRS. GRIEVE : I wish May hadn't. But now that she has sprung this mine—of diamonds—on us, I presume you will tell me the truth ?

JAMES KNIGHT : Of course I will—if you insist ! But I wish to God you wouldn't press me.

MRS. GRIEVE (*touching her pendant*) : Jimmy, is this paste ?

JAMES KNIGHT (*rising*) : No, it is not.

MRS. GRIEVE (*after a long pause*) : I suppose it is all through alike ? This—and this ? . . . (*She begins feverishly to pluck at her trinkets*.)

JAMES KNIGHT : Stop, Eve, please stop ! I must ask you to re-consider—I must tell you !— I believe I have behaved infamously to you, dear, but you must really try to forgive me when you see my point of view. I love you hope-

lessly—to do you justice, quite hopelessly. I will never allow that the woman I adore is a flirt. You have never, I swear it, encouraged me by word, look or sign!

MRS. GRIEVE (*rueful*): Yes, I have always been perfectly brutal to you.

JAMES KNIGHT: For my good. You have been sincere. And things being as they were, you would never have chosen to accept valuable presents from me. You postulated that from the very first. I found out a way to cheat you for my own selfish ends. I wanted to see my jewel in a worthy setting for her beauty—so much more than rubies! I am a moral criminal. I wanted to watch diamonds sparkling near your eyes, and pearls lying on your white neck; to hear the world admire you and them—for you may say what you like—a woman, ay, the prettiest, can play her part better when the scene is set in diamonds. I took a base advantage of your innocence—for what nice woman ever knew the value of things?—and gained myself the greatest possible pleasure. The money was there, ready for my wife if I had one, and she could have been no other than you. And, Eve, though some of the things were expensive, the rest were bargains. I have been cultivating a quite remarkable *flair* for uncut gems and jewels, in the last few years. I amuse myself attending sales, and getting things knocked down to me cheap through knowing more about them than even the Jews do. It's something to be proud of, that! Those three emeralds—I had them all set separately for you, they were tastelessly arranged in a single

ring—were acquired at the sale of the effects of a distant relative of mine. Three fine emeralds for a hundred and eighty! That was good, you'll own! Eve, I have truly had my money's worth of pleasure out of them, first and last. I have seen them flashing and glowing on the breast of the woman I love. Don't give me the agony of having them returned to me! I see you are trying to take them off now! Put down your hands! Eve, my darling Eve, don't give them back to me; wear them, throw them away if you must, but if you return them it will, I believe, break my heart!

MRS. GRIEVE (*putting down her hands*): I will marry you.

VIOLET HUNT.