

admittance to the comfortable room where 'Mr. Arthur' sat by a huge fire, leisurely smoking a cigar, as though he were a royal personage. There was quite time enough for Lotte to feel that if she had come on a fool's errand it would be an unpardonable matter to have insisted on seeing 'Mr. Arthur,' before she found herself following an assistant down a carpeted passage to the great man's door.

Mr. Arthur stood up with his back to the fire, his cigar behind his back, as Lotte came in. It was a concession to her delicate refinement of air; and it said something for Mr. Arthur that he recognised it, despite her very shabby clothing.

'Well, madam,' he said, 'what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?'

His manner was a trifle supercilious. He did not see how Lotte could have important business such as must be dealt with by one of the firm, and he rather suspected an appeal for alms.

'I called about a pearl necklace which I——' Lotte began.

Mr. Arthur flung his cigar into the fire. He jumped at Lotte and snatched the necklace from her. He flew to the door and shouted. Three other gentlemen, as like himself as possible, but a little older or a little younger, came in answer to his summons.

'The pearls!—the pearls!' he shouted.

The other gentlemen shouted, too. To Lotte's imagination the room seemed full of excited 'Mr. Arthurs.'

Presently the excitement calmed down a bit; and the oldest of the gentlemen turned his attention to Lotte, who was waiting to tell her story.

These were sold to you, madam, by mistake, as a string of imitation pearls, a year ago. We have been advertising everywhere for you since.'

'I never saw the advertisement,' said Lotte.

'But you discovered that the pearls were not what you had supposed them to be? How did you discover it?'

'I was playing the violin at a party this week. A gentleman noticed the pearls. He said he would give me seven thousand pounds for them. I thought he was jesting. But I went home and told my husband—who is very ill, or he would have come to you himself.'

'Who was the gentleman?'

Lotte produced the card which she had brought with her. It passed from one gentleman to another, and they smiled at one another. The youngest said, 'Cute old fox!' and stroked his fair moustache.

'May I ask what reward you expect for restoring the pearls?' inquired one.

'Reward, sir?' Lotte answered, lifting her eyes to the questioner. 'I never thought of reward. The pearls are yours and not mine. I suppose you will let me have the money I paid for the necklace?'

'You have restored this without hope of fee or reward, although you have been offered seven thousand pounds for it!'

'But it was not mine to sell—not ours; so my husband said when I told him.'

All the faces seemed to look wonderfully kind at Lotte.

'As a matter of fact,' said the eldest gentleman, 'the necklace is practically priceless. It belongs to the Duchess of Westshire. It has cost lives as well as years and money to find these pearls, perfectly matched, perfectly graduated. Her Grace entrusted it to us to repair the clasp. By some incredible error, it was laid down where an inexperienced assistant found it and sold it to you. Her Grace has been very considerate with us. Such a thing never happened before now in our hands. My dear young lady, you have done us an incalculable service!'

'I will go now,' said Lotte. 'I am very glad, sir, that we found out about the necklace. I will wish you good-morning.'

She made a little old-fashioned curtsy. Then she remembered and blushed.

'Please may I have the thirty-five shillings?' she said. 'We are poor and my husband is ill.'

'Thirty-five shillings! Good heavens! Why, the firm is indebted to you for more than it can pay! And in any case, there is a reward of a thousand pounds for the restoration of this.'

The room seemed to go round with Lotte. 'A thousand pounds!' she repeated. 'August would not take it. It is too much for just being honest.'

'I will come with you and see your husband,' the elder man said. 'It is on my way to the Duchess's. I must let her know at once that the pearls are found. It will be better to talk business matters over with your husband.'

A few minutes later Lotte found herself flying noiselessly westward in an electric brougham, the gentleman by her side saying little, but looking very kindly at Lotte now and again, while his hand caressed the jewel case which he was carrying.

Lotte waited for him while he interviewed the Duchess and restored the precious jewels to her keeping.

He came from the house radiant.

'Her Grace is coming to see you,' he said. 'My child, whom the Duchess befriends is fortunate indeed.'

It was like a dream to Lotte. There was a thousand pounds in bank for them, and the jewellers had also insisted on providing August and Lotte with their passage money to Italy. And before they had got over these wonders there was a most beautiful young lady in the doorway of the poor little room, asking for Lotte and August; and smiling at them with the most bewitching kindness; while her bright eyes roamed hither and thither, taking in the evidences of poverty and refinement in the room.

'You are to get strong,' she said to August; 'and next season you shall both play at my parties. The Duke adores music, and so do I.'

Her eye fell on a sheet of manuscript music, on which August had been working when he fell ill. She seemed to understand without asking questions.

'You shall dedicate this to me,' she said; 'I am going to look after you both. I adore artists, and you have rendered us an incalculable service. It would have been so easy to break it up and scatter the pearls. I am going to bring my own doctor to see you. You must be got away to a good climate as soon as possible, the doctor says.'

The Duchess never did things by halves. All sorts of dainties and delicacies for a sick man were rained on August and Lotte. Every hour of the day a big van seemed to stop at the door with another hamper or another parcel. Fortunately, there were the landlady and her children to share these perishable gifts. She had been very patient with August and Lotte since the bad times had come, and the gentleman from Harley street decided that August might be moved almost at once by easy stages.

So Lotte dressed her Christmas-tree for the landlady's children, and loaded it with all manner of wonderful things. And the little child-angel at the top of the tree, with outspread wings, seemed to hover over them as in the act to bless them. All the wonderful things had come true. August was going to be strong and bonny once more, and the world would listen to his beautiful music. The good God had not forgotten them.

And now, with her head on his breast, and hidden eyes, wonderful in their obscurity, Lotte might tell August her mother secret.—Katharine Tynan, in the *Ave Maria*.

UNDIGESTED FOOD IS POISON

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