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Chapter 13

It is probable that Mrs. Da Souza, excellent wife and mother though she had proved herself to be, had never admired her husband more than when, followed by the malevolent glances of Miss Montessor and her friend, she, with her daughter and Da Souza, re-entered the gates of the Lodge. The young ladies had announced their intention of sitting in the fly until they were allowed speech with their late host; to which he had replied that they were welcome to sit there until doomsday so long as they remained outside his gates. Mr. Da Souza lingered for a moment behind and laid his finger upon his nose.

"It ain't no use, my dears," he whispered confidentially. "He's fairly got the hump. Between you and me he'd give a bit not to have us, but me and him being old friends - you see, we know a bit about one another."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" Miss Montessor remarked, with a toss of her head. "Well, you and your wife and your little chit of a daughter are welcome to him so far as we are concerned, aren't they, Flossie?"

"Well, I should say so," agreed the young lady, who rather affected Americanisms.

Da Souza stroked his little imperial, and winked solemnly.

"You are young ladies of spirit," he declared. "Now -"

"Hiram!"

"I am coming, my dear," he called over his shoulder. "One word more, my charming young friends! No. 7, Racket's Court, City, is my address. Look in sometime when you're that way, and we'll have a bit of lunch together, and just at present take my advice. Get back to London and write him from there. He is not in a good humour at present."

"We are much obliged, Mr. Da Souza," the young lady answered loftily. "As we have engagements in London this afternoon, we may as well go now - eh, Flossie?"

"Right along," answered the young lady, "I'm with you, but as to writing Mr. Trent, you can tell him from me, Mr. Da Souza, that we want to have nothing more to do with him. A fellow that can treat ladies as he has treated us is no gentleman. You can tell him that. He's an ignorant, common fellow, and for my part I despise him."

"Same here," echoed Miss Montessor, heartily. "We ain't used to associate with such as him!"

"Hiram!"

Mr. Da Souza raised his hat and bowed; the ladies were tolerably gracious and the fly drove off. Whereupon Mr. Da Souza followed his wife and daughter along the drive and caught them up upon the doorstep. With mingled feelings of apprehension and elation he ushered them into the morning-room where Trent was standing looking out of the window with his hands behind him. At their entrance he did not at once turn round. Mr. Da Souza coughed apologetically.

"Here we are, my friend," he remarked. "The ladies are anxious to wish you good morning."

Trent faced them with a sudden gesture of impatience. He seemed on the point of an angry exclamation, when his eyes met Julie Da Souza's. He held his breath for a moment and was silent. Her face was scarlet with shame, and her lips were trembling. For her sake Trent restrained himself.

"Glad to see you back again, Julie," he said, ignoring her mother's outstretched hand and beaming smile of welcome. "Going to be a hot day, I think. You must get out in the hay-field. Order what breakfast you please, Da Souza," he continued on his way to the door; "you must be hungry-after such an early start!"

Mrs. Da Souza sat down heavily and rang the bell.

"He was a little cool," she remarked, "but that was to be expected. Did you observe the notice he took of Julie? Dear child!"

Da Souza rubbed his hands and nodded meaningly. The girl, who, between the two, was miserable enough, sat down with a little sob. Her mother looked at her in amazement.

"My Julie," she exclaimed, "my dear child! You see, Hiram, she is faint! She is overcome!"

The child, she was very little more, broke out at last in speech, passionately, yet with a miserable fore-knowledge of the ineffectiveness of anything she might say.

"It is horrible," she cried, "it is maddening! Why do we do it? Are we paupers or adventurers? Oh! let me go away! I am ashamed to stay in this house!"

Her father, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat and his legs far apart, looked at her in blank and speechless amazement; her mother, with more consideration but equal lack of sympathy, patted her gently on the back of her hand.

"Silly Julie," she murmured, "what is there that is horrible, little one?"

The dark eyes blazed with scorn, the delicately curved lips shook.

"Why, the way we thrust ourselves upon this man is horrible!" she cried. "Can you not see that we are not welcome, that he wishes us gone?"

Da Souza smiled in a superior manner; the smile of a man who, if only he would, could explain all things. He patted his daughter on the head with a touch which was meant to be playful.

"My little one," he said, "you are mistaken! Leave these matters to those who are older and wiser than you. It is but just now that my good friend said to me, 'Da Souza,' he says, 'I will not have you take your little daughter away!' Oh, we shall see! We shall see!"

Julie's tears crept through the fingers closely pressed over her eyes.

"I do not believe it," she sobbed. "He has scarcely looked at me all the time, and I do not want him to. He despises us all - and I don't blame him. It is horrid!"

Mrs. Da Souza, with a smile which was meant to be arch, had something to say, but the arrival of breakfast broke up for a while the conversation. Her husband, whom Nature had blessed with a hearty appetite at all times, was this morning after his triumph almost disposed to be boisterous. He praised the cooking, chaffed the servants to their infinite disgust, and continually urged his wife and daughter to keep pace with him in his onslaught upon the various dishes which were placed before him. Before the meal was over Julie had escaped from the table crying softly. Mr. Da Souza's face darkened as he looked up at the sound of her movement, only to see her skirt vanishing through the door.

"Shall you have trouble with her, my dear?" he asked his wife anxiously.

That estimable lady shook her head with a placid smile. "Julie is so sensitive," she muttered, "but she is not disobedient. When the time comes I can make her mind."

"But the time has come!" Da Souza exclaimed. "It is here now, and Julie is sulky. She will have red eyes and she is not gay! She will not attract him. You must speak with her, my dear."

"I will go now - this instant," she answered, rising. "But, Hiram, there is one thing I would much like to know."

"Ugh! You women! You are always like that! There is so much that you want to know!"

"Most women, Hiram - not me! Do I ever seek to know your secrets? But this time - yes, it would be wiser to tell me a little!"

"Well?"

"This Mr. Trent, he asked us here, but it is plain that our company is not pleasant to him. He does his best to get rid of us - he succeeds - he plans that we shall not return. You see him alone and all that is altered. His little scheme has been in vain. We remain! He does not look at our Julie. He speaks of marriage with contempt. Yet you say he will marry her - he, a millionaire! What does it mean, Hiram?"

"The man, he is in my power," Da Souza says in a ponderous and stealthy whisper. "I know something."

She rose and imprinted a solemn kiss upon his forehead. There was something sacramental about the deliberate caress.

"Hiram," she said, "you are a wonderful man!"