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RIDGE***

***MIXED
GRILL***

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Mixed Grill

EAN 8596547216360

DigiCat, 2022

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I—THIRD PERSON SINGULAR

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I MET him when I was in town at a party, where he and I were about the only grownups; he took a good deal of trouble over the youngsters, doing conjuring tricks to amuse them, and singing songs at the pianoforte that made them laugh. Later in the evening, when some of the kids had been fetched, he and I became friendly, and we had a most interesting chat. He agreed with my views regarding the Australian team of the previous summer; he was in full sympathy concerning the difficulty of making one pair of white gloves do for two evenings. I asked for his name and address.

“Don’t think I have a card to spare, old chap,” he said, in his easy way. “Daresay we shall meet again.”

“I’d awfully like to make sure of it,” I said. “My mother may want you to run down to our place.”

“That’s a different matter. Here’s a pencil; write it on something. Or allow me. I’m coming back here at ten,” he went on. “You won’t be gone before that, I hope?”

“I must,” I replied. “My governess will call at half-past nine to take me home.”

“What an existence we men about town do live, to be sure. Always hurrying from one place to another.”

“If my mother writes to you, Mr. Cartwright,” I said, offering my hand, “you won’t fail to come along.”

My mater is peculiar; she has a fixed and permanent idea that any suggestion coming from me must necessarily be overruled and treated as of no serious importance; I fancy

this comes from the feeling, often expressed by her, that she has to be both father and mother. It is rather a lonely life for her, with only my governess and the servants for company. I have heard the maids saying more than once to each other that they wondered mistress did not marry again. "She could well afford to," remarked cook.

I do think I showed cleverness and tact—something very like high diplomacy. I reminded my mother of the parties I had attended, and said I felt glad there was no necessity for us to have our house turned upside down and to give an evening in return. At lunch time I referred to the matter again. Later I said good-night to her, and once more made similar allusion to the subject.

Cards of invitation went out the next day, and my governess started on the preparation of a charade. My governess is not, if I may say so, possessed of incredible cleverness, and after writing out the charade and starting rehearsals, she found she had forgotten the word, and as no one could guess it, and she appeared unable to think of another, it became evident that we could not rely upon this as a source of entertainment. It was then I announced to my mother that I had already sent a note to a friend of mine, a man whose equal for entertaining a party was rarely encountered, and that I expected a reply from him in the course of a post or two. She blamed me for taking the step without asking permission, and praised me for coming to the rescue with such an excellent idea.

"Did you say Cartwright—Mr. Cartwright, dear?"

"Yes, mother. Do you know him?"

"I don't think I have met the name."

When Mr. Cartwright's postcard arrived, and the maid put it by the side of my plate, my mother, glancing down the table before opening her own letters, asked quickly from whom it had come, and when I told her she contradicted me, quoting, rather excitedly, the usual Biblical and historical cases where severe punishment had been given for the telling of lies, or commendation awarded for the statement of exact truth. I ventured to repeat the information, and passed the card to her as a document in support; she looked at it, cried a little, and asked me to forgive her for being so cross. I begged her not to mention it.

"Just for the moment," she explained, "it took me back about twelve years."

"Before my time, mother?"

"Yes. You were not thought of then. Does your friend sign himself Cartwright?"

"My dear mother, how else could he sign himself?"

"Send him another line, and say that your mother is looking forward to the pleasure of making his acquaintance."

"You must tell me how to spell some of the words," I said.

The carriage was to meet some of the guests who came from London, and I went down to the station myself and arranged with one of the cabmen there, so that Mr. Cartwright should be brought up alone and without being crowded by the children. My mother said I could ask him to stay the night, and ordered a room at the hotel; but he wrote to say he had another engagement in town, and he desired to catch the seven fifty-four back. I remarked that

this showed how popular he was in society; my mother gave a word approving businesslike habits. It seemed exactly like Mr. Cartwright that he should arrive in the cab at the precise hour arranged.

"Had a good journey?" I cried, running to him in the hall as he was getting out of his thick overcoat. "I was afraid, somehow, that you'd back out of it at the last moment."

"Never disappoint the public," he replied cheerfully. "Sometimes I disappoint myself, but that is another matter."

I asked what he had in his large bag.

"Brought down a figure; thought perhaps a little ventriloquism would be a novelty."

"Anything you do will be sure to be appreciated. I've been thinking ever since I met you of the perfectly splendid way you entertained at that party."

"Good man!"

"And I do feel it's most awfully kind of you to come all this distance just to oblige me. Let's go upstairs, shall we, Mr. Cartwright? I'll take you to the room that used to be called the nursery."

He got rid of his overcoat there, and, asking me for a pair of scissors, went carefully with them around the edge of his shirt cuffs. I inquired whether he had been going out to many parties since I last saw him: he replied that he had no right to complain; there were plenty of exceedingly clever people about and he could only regard himself as cleverish. I exhibited the soldiers that mother had given me for my birthday. He took the blue men, I took the red, and he was Napoleon and I Wellington. We sat upon the floor, and he was so very good as to show me exactly what happened at

the battle of Waterloo, an incident of peculiar interest to me, because it occurred on one of the few dates I am able to retain in my memory.

"But, Mr. Cartwright, how is it you know so much about this?" He was moving some dominoes up from the right to represent the approach of Blucher and the German troops.

"Used to be a soldier man," he replied.

"Why ever didn't you stay in the army, and become a Field Marshal?"

"By Jove!" he cried, "that would have been a rattling good idea. Wonder I didn't think of it at the time."

"Is it too late now?"

"Surely not," he answered promptly, "for such an exceptionally fortunate person as I am. Anyway, so far as 1815 is concerned, Blucher, you see, had Grouchy to compete with—this double-six is Grouchy, with thirty-five thousand men—but Blucher outmarched him, came up, and —" He swept the rest of his blue men down with a wave of the hand, and hummed "Rule, Britannia."

I expressed a wish that he had selected the reds, so that he might have won; but he remarked in a change of mood that anything like success in any game would, by reason of its novelty, have given him serious alarm. I asked how the time was going.

"Lent my watch to a relative," he mentioned. "A rather distant relative; but I see a good deal of him, from the waist upwards."

And he went to the mantelpiece to inspect the clock.

"Little man," in a sharp voice, "who is this?"

"That? Oh, that's dear mother."

He looked at it closely, whistled a tune softly.

"I shall have to catch an earlier train," he announced suddenly. "I'm sorry. You make my apologies to every one, and say the muddle was entirely mine."

"But you can't, Mr. Cartwright. There's nothing before the six minutes to eight."

My governess came in, and he replaced the frame quickly. My governess has sometimes complained that the house is lacking in male society; she took advantage of this opportunity to talk with great vivacity, and, in tones very different from those she uses in addressing me, inquired with affectation concerning the theatres in town, and entertainments generally. Fearing she would try Mr. Cartwright's patience, as she has often tried mine, I endeavoured to detach her; but the task proved one beyond my abilities, and she went on to submit, with deference, that what was required was an increase of merriment in life, a view that, coming from her, amazed me into silence. Mr. Cartwright answered that in his opinion life was full of rollicking fun, completely furnished with joy.

"What a gift," cried my governess, "to be able always to see the cheerful side! It means, of course, that you have been singularly free from anything like disaster. Tell me, now, what is the nearest to a sad experience that you ever had?"

"I expect we ought to be getting downstairs," he remarked.

In the hall I introduced Mr. Cartwright, with pride, to my mother.

“Charmed to meet you,” she said, offering her hand. My mother can be very pleasant, and if, at the moment, she gave signs of agitation, it was not to be wondered at; I myself felt nervous. “My boy tells me that you are going to be so very kind—” She appeared unable to go on with the sentence.

“I was glad,” he said, “to find he had not forgotten me. It isn’t everybody who has a good memory.”

“It isn’t everybody who cares to possess one,” she said, with some spirit. “I have heard of cases where men forget their real names.”

“I have heard of cases,” he remarked, “where women have been in a great hurry to change theirs.”

It struck me they were not hitting it off, as one might say, and I took his hand and led him into the drawing-room, where the children were having refreshment between the dances. He made himself at home with them at once, danced a quadrille with the smallest girl, consulted with my governess about the playing of some accompaniments, and amused her by a remark which he made. A man who could make my governess laugh was a man capable of anything. Going to the end of the room, he took a figure of a boy in a Tam o’ Shanter cap out of his bag, and, setting it upon his knee, started absolutely the best entertainment I have seen in the whole course of my existence. We all rested on the floor; my mother stood near the doorway, but I was too much interested in Mr. Cartwright’s performance to pay attention to her. When I did look around once, to get her to join in the applause, I found she was looking hard at my friend, trying, I suppose, to find out how he did it. He began

to sing, with the figure making absurd interruptions that sent us all into fits of laughter; my mother, still serious, took a chair. Mr. Cartwright had a good voice; I don't know whether you would call it a baritone or a tenor, but it was so pleasant to listen to that I half agreed with a sensible girl sitting just in front of me, who said she wished the figure would cease interfering.

"Lor' bless my soul," said the figure, "thought you'd never get that note, Mr. Cartwright. Only just managed it." And, in a confidential way, "Aren't you a rotten singer, though? Don't you think so, strictly between ourselves? Have you ever tried selling coke? That would be about your mark, you know!"

We clapped hands and stamped feet when he finished, and even the girls declared they would rather hear something more from him than go on with the dances. He looked at his watch, and I called out to him that he was all right for his train; he had a quarter of an hour to spare. He came back to the pianoforte. There he touched the keys, making a selection in his mind.

"No, no!" cried my mother, as the prelude to a song began. "Please, not that one!"

He changed the air at once, and went off into an Irish song. You know the kind of tune—one that makes you keep on the move all the time you are listening. About a ball given by Mrs. O'Flaherty, where the fiddler, once started, declined to stop, and the couples kept on with the hop, hop, hop, so that the dance lasted for I forget how long—three weeks, I think. The couples gradually became tired, the tune went slower and slower.

“Mr. Cartwright,” cried my governess, in her high voice, “you ought to be a professional.”

“I am a professional,” he replied.

I rushed like mad out into the hall. I wanted to get the opportunity of thinking as hard and as swiftly as possible. There was no time to lose; the station cab stood outside the door, waiting for him I went up, three stairs at a time, and opened the door of my room; it had been used as a temporary cloak-room, and jackets and hats were littered all over the place. As I threw these about—everything had been moved by the servants with some idea of making elaborate preparations—it struck me it was not unlike a nightmare; one of those nightmares where you are in a most terrific hurry, and everything slips away and eludes you. I could have cried with annoyance at the thought that Mr. Cartwright was now preparing to leave, asking for me, perhaps, and certainly wondering when and how he was to receive his fee for making the special visit from town. In my excitement I took the pillow and threw it into the air; underneath I found my money-box, and some other articles which had been shifted from the dressing-table. I seized one of my dumb-bells, smashed the box, counted out the money with trembling fingers.

“Four and three,” I said to myself. “I shall give him four shillings, and tell him I’ll send the rest on.”

I slid down two flights. As I neared the landing above the hall I could hear that music had started afresh and dancing had recommenced. I was engaged to a rather sensible girl—already referred to—for the polka, and she would be looking out for me; but for the moment I was too full of troubles of

my own to consider those of other people. The front door was open, and my mother was waving her hand.

"Mr. Cartwright!" I called out, running past her. "Mr. Cartwright! Oh, do let me speak to you for a minute."

"Can't stop, old boy," he said from the cab. He seemed rather quiet.

"But I must speak to you. Mother, may I go down to the station with him? Oh, you are a good sort," as she nodded her consent. I jumped in, and the cab started.

I felt so thankful when I saw in his hand an envelope with some pieces of gold, and I felt proud of her. I might have guessed mother would know how to do the right thing.

"Little man!" He was looking at a slip of paper with some pencilled words which the envelope also contained. "Do you ever take advice, I wonder?"

"Do you, Mr. Cartwright?"

"I find it easier to give. People have been filling me up with it ever since I was about your age, and some of it has been good, but I have always done exactly as I pleased."

"I suppose that's the best plan."

"No!" he replied. "It has some advantages, but not many."

"But aren't you"—I scarcely knew how to phrase it—"aren't you exactly what you want to be, Mr. Cartwright? You're so good-humoured and jolly."

He gave a gasp and looked at the window.

"I don't lose my temper now," he said. "I used to, and the last time I lost with it everything that was worth having. Here's the advice I want to give you. Forget me, but try to remember this. Quarrel, if you must quarrel, with the people

who don't matter. Never quarrel with your friends. I had fierce words once with the best friend a man ever had."

"What was his name?"

"It has taken her twelve years to forgive me, and in that time I've gone to pieces. All just for the luxury of five minutes of wild talk. Here's the station; my wife will be waiting for me at the other end, to take the money I've earned." He laughed in a peculiar way. "Goodbye, old chap. Not too big for this, are you?" He placed his hands on either side of my face. "I wish—oh, I wish you were my boy!"

My mother asked me, when I got back and told her, to show her exactly where he had kissed me, and she pressed her lips for some moments to the place on my forehead. Then we went in and brightened up the party.

II—A BENEVOLENT CHARACTER

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A YOUTH came into the small tobacconist's and inquired, across the counter, whether there happened to be in the neighbourhood a branch establishment of a well-known firm (mentioned by name) dealing in similar goods and guaranteeing to save the consumer thirty-three per cent. He required the information, it appeared, because he contemplated buying a packet of cigarettes.

No, said the proprietor (after he finished his speech and the youth had gone), not quite the limit. Near to the edge, I admit; but remembering my friend, Mr. Ardwick, I can't say it's what you'd call the highest possible. It was a privilege to know Ardwick; he was, without any doubt whatsoever, a masterpiece. I've give up all hopes of ever finding his equal.

He was a customer here at the time Mrs. Ingram had the shop—and when I say customer, of course I don't mean that he ever handed over a single halfpenny. Mrs. Ingram had only been a widow for about a twelvemonth, and naturally enough she liked gentlemen's society; and Ardwick, after he got his compensation out of the County Council—that, by the by, was one of his triumphs—he had nothing else to do, and he became very much attached to that chair what you're sitting on now. He'd call in to have a look at the morning paper, and read it through from start to finish; later in the day he'd call to see the evening paper, and keep tight hold of it till he'd come to the name of the printers at the foot of the last page. Between whiles he'd pretend to make himself handy at dusting the counter, and help himself to a pipe of tobacco, out of the shag-jar. It was a pretty sight to see old Ardwick, before he left of an evening, talk, as he filled a pocket with matches out of the stand, about the way the rich robbed the poor.

Having caught sight of Mrs. Ingram's pass-book that she was sending to the bank—he offered to post it, and walked all the way to Lombard Street and stuck to the twopence—Ardwick makes up his mind to take the somewhat desperate step of proposing to Mrs. I.

“Very kind of you,” she says, “but I fancy, Mr. Ardwick, you're a shade too stingy to run in double harness with me. Poor Ingram,” she says, “was always freehanded with his money, and if I should ever get married again it will have to be to some one of a similar disposition. But thank you all the same,” she says, “for asking!”

Ardwick ran across his friend Kimball in Downham Road that evening and lent him a match, and said Kimball was the very party he wanted to meet. They had a long, confidential sort of talk together outside the fire-station, and they came to such high words that a uniformed man, who was talking to one of his girls, threatened to turn the hose on them. The two strolled down Kingsland Road in a cooler frame of mind, and when they said "Good-night" at the canal bridge Kimball promised to do the best for Mr. Ardwick that lay in his power. Kimball explained that he was not going to do it out of friendship, but mainly because his wife had recently docked his allowance, and, in consequence, he felt a grudge against the sex in general.

"I promise you," said Mr. Ardwick, still shaking his hand, "that you won't lose over the transaction."

"Knowing you as I do," remarked Kimball, "I quite recognise that it'll take a bit of doing to make anything out of it."

Mr. Ardwick was in the shop, here, the following afternoon. Mrs. Ingram felt surprised to see him at that hour, and she locks up the till pretty smartly and moves the box of World-Famed Twopenny Cheroots.

"Something you said, Mrs. Ingram," he began, "has been worryin' of me, and I've called round to talk it over. You seem to have got the impression in your mind that I'm, if anything, a trifle close with my money. I should like to convince you, ma'am, that you are doing me an injustice, and to prove it I'm going to adopt a very simple plan."

"Have you brought back that watch of mine I gave you to get mended?"

“One topic at a time,” urged Mr. Ardwick. “My idea of benevolence is something wider and broader than that of most people.” He glanced at the clock. “What I propose to do is this. To the first customer what enters this shop after half-past three I shall present the sum of five pound.”

“Five what?”

“Five quid,” he said, in a resolute sort of manner. “The first one, mind you, after half-past three. It wants two minutes to the half-hour now. All you’ve got to do, ma’am, is to stand where you are, and to judge whether I’m a man of a generous disposition or whether I’m the opposite.”

As the clock turned the half-hour an old woman came in and put down four farthings for snuff; when she had gone Mr. Ardwick mentioned that he knew for a fact that the clock was a trifle fast. An elderly gentleman in workhouse clothes came for a screw of tobacco; Mr. Ardwick pointed out to Mrs. Ingram that he never proposed to extend his offer to those supported by the State. Kimball arrived at twenty-five minutes to, and Mr. Ardwick glared at him privately for not keeping the appointment. Kimball bought a box of wooden matches, and was leaving the shop when Mr. Ardwick called him.

“My man,” he said, “your face and your general appearance suggest you are not one of those who are termed favourites of fortune. Tell me, now, have you ever been the recipient, so to speak, of a stroke of luck?”

“Not to my knowledge, sir,” said Kimball, answering very respectfully.

“Never had a windfall of any kind? No sudden descent of manna from above? Very well, then.” Mr. Ardwick took out