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# **The Twelfth Hour**

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THE  
TWELFTH HOUR

BY

ADA LEVERSON

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## CHAPTER I

### FELICITY

"Hallo, Greenstock! Lady Chetwode in?"

"Her ladyship is not at home, sir. But she is sure to see you, Master Savile," said the butler, with a sudden and depressing change of manner, from correct impassibility to the conventional familiarity of a patronising old retainer.

"Dressing, eh? You look all right Greenstock."

"Well, I am well, and I am not well, Master Savile, if you can understand that, sir. My harsthma" (so he pronounced it), "as been exceedingly troublesome lately."

"Ah, that's capital!" Not listening, the boy—he was sixteen, dark, and very handsome, with a determined expression, and generally with an air of more self-control than seemed required for the occasion—walked up deliberately, three steps at a time, knocked, with emphasis, at his sister's dressing-room door, and said—

"I say, Felicity, can I come in?" [8]

"Who's there? Don't come in!"

Upon which invitation he entered the room with a firm step.

"Oh, it's you, Savile darling. I am glad to see you! Dear pet! Come and tell me all about everything—papa and the party—and, look out, dear, don't tread on my dresses! Give Mr. Crofton a chair, Everett. Even you mustn't sit down on a perfectly new hat!"

Felicity was a lovely little blonde creature about twenty-five years old, dressed in a floating Watteau-like garment of vaporous blue, painted with faded pink roses. She was seated in a large carved and gilded chair, opposite an excessively Louis-Quinze mirror, while her pale golden hair was being brushed out by a brown, inanimate-looking maid. Her little oval face, with its soft cloudy hair growing low on the forehead, long blue eyes, and rosebud mouth, had something of the romantic improbability of an eighteenth-century miniature. From the age of two Felicity had been an acknowledged beauty. She profited by her grasp of this fact merely by being more frank

than most charming people, and more natural than most disagreeable ones. With little self-consciousness, she took a cool sportsman-like pleasure in the effect she produced, and perhaps enjoyed the envy and admiration she had excited in her perambulator in Kensington Gardens [9] almost as much as her most showy successes in later life.

The most effective of these (so far) had been her marriage. Hopelessly bowled over, as he called it, by her detailed loveliness, and not even frightened by her general brilliance, Lord Chetwode had insisted on her making the match of the previous season. He was a good-looking, amiable, and wealthy young man, who was as lavish as if he had not had a penny, and who showed his extravagantly long descent chiefly by being (for a racing man) rather eccentrically interested in the subject of decoration.

He was an owner of racehorses and a collector of curiosities, and these tastes gave him certain interests apart from his wife. He was, however, very much in love with her, and showed it chiefly by writing her nearly every day long, elaborate, and conspicuously illegible love-letters. She was not an expert in handwriting, nor had she time or patience to decipher them. So she merely treasured them (unread) in a green and white striped silk box. For under all her outward sentimentality, Felicity was full of tenderness, especially for her husband. This was not surprising, for he was a most agreeable companion, a great friend, quite devoted to her, to his pretty home in London, and his picturesque old house in the country, from all of which, [10] however, he was as a rule markedly absent. If one asked after Chetwode, the answer was nearly always that he was away.

He had chosen every detail of the house in Park Street with a patience worthy of his passion. In the bedroom, especially, not a concession was made, not a point stretched. All was purest Louis-Quinze. But in spite of this, and amidst all her tapestry and old French furniture, Felicity had a very contemporary air. About everything was the recent look characteristic of the home of a lately married couple. The room looked as if it had been decorated the day before for a twentieth-century Madame de Pompadour. But, if the background was almost archæological, the atmosphere was absolutely modern. In this incongruity was a certain fascination.



Though the bridal freshness still lingered, a more wilful element was also observable. Invitation-cards, race-cards, the *Daily Mail*, magazines, English and French novels, and cigarettes were freely scattered about, and an expert would have seen at a glance that the dresses lying in every direction could not have formed part of any trousseau. They had obviously been chosen with (or against) the advice of Lord Chetwode.

Savile sat down on a pink curved sofa, and said definitely [11] —

"Look here, Felicity, I want to speak to you."

"Yes, darling?"

"Does Chetwode know what's going to win the Cambridgeshire?"

"How can he know, darling? Would it be fair? Of course he has some vague *idea*. Candid Friend he said was the favourite. He says it's a certainty. But *his* certainties! (Everett, look out. You've been overdoing the waving lately. Remember how careful I have to be not to look like a wax-doll in a hair-dresser's shop ... with *my* complexion)! Go on, Savile, — what's the party going to be like?"

"Like nothing on earth, my dear, as usual. One of the governor's baffling entertainments."

"Well, I don't care what people say, Savile! I think papa's parties are the greatest fun one can get anywhere. It's a wonderful mixture, — a sort of Russian salad. How exciting it is, for instance, never being quite sure whether one is going to be taken to dinner by — Lord Rosebery, or — Little Tich!"

"As it happens, my dear, they've both refused," said Savile ironically.

"Oh, Savile, don't be funny when I've no time to laugh. Do you deny papa's peculiar talent for celebrities? Is De Valdez coming?"

"The Spanish composer? Oh, rather! He's coming over about his new opera. He's all right. [12] At least, I bear him rather, but girls like him."

"And who will be the great card this time, Savile?"

"Of course, Roy Beaumont, the inventor."

"What on earth's he invented?"

"Himself, I should think. He's only about twenty-one. Roy's a capital chap, really. The only thing is, he wears hats that he thinks suit him. Otherwise he dresses rather well, for a dandy."

"Why on earth shouldn't his hats suit him?" said Lady Chetwode in surprise.

"Oh, never mind! I can't go into all that. Why, because you ought to wear things, because they're *right*, not because— — Oh, girls don't understand dress! Don't let's fatigue ourselves discussing it. Any one can see you've never been to Eton."

"Well, I should rather hope they could," murmured Felicity, looking in the glass.

"F. J. Rivers and Arthur Mervyn, the actor, are coming, and— oh, a lot more."

"I see, it's a clever party. Isn't it fun, Savile, being the only stupid person in a crowd of clever people? They make such a fuss about one. Aren't any real people coming?"

"A few. Some heavy M.P.'s and their wives, and Aunt William, and of course old Ridokanaki." [13]

"Oh, the Greek millionaire,—the banker?"

"Don't call him the banker; it reminds me of *The Hunting of the Snark*."

Felicity laughed.

"Yes; Mr. Ridokanaki is rather like a sort of Snark, and you and papa are hunting him for Sylvia. Will it come off?"

"Shouldn't think so," said Savile thoughtfully. "He's rather a bore, but he's a good sort. Of course, Sylvia ought to marry him. All the pretty girls are marrying these Anglo-Aliens. He's very keen. But about my affairs—I say, Everett, do take away these fluffy rustling things."

Everett having completed her task, with a stiff smile, and a rain-bow of chiffons over her arm, faded away.

Felicity, completely dressed, turned her chair round and put up her absurd little high-heeled shoes.

"Now then, fire away, old boy."

Savile, taking this command literally, stretched out his hand for the cigarettes. Felicity snatched them away.

"How dare you! You won't grow any more! Here, have a chocolate!"

Savile looked at her with a pitying smile and said slowly [14] —

"What rot! Grow! As if I wanted to grow! As if I had the time! I've got more serious things than that to do I can tell you. I have two rather awful troubles. Look here. Things are a bit off at home just now. The Governor is furious about Chetwode not coming to the party."

Lady Chetwode's colour deepened.

"Well, what about me, Savile? Do you think I'm pleased? Is it my fault the Cambridgeshire's run on Wednesday? Do be just to me! Do I make the racing engagements? You can't pretend that I can alter the rules of Newmarket because papa chooses to give a lot of absurd parties!"

"I know, old girl — but can't you make him give it up?"

"Who ever yet made Chetwode give up anything he wants to do? Besides, it's not like a dinner-party, or his wedding, or anything like that, Savile, you know. After all, he isn't *bound* to be there!"

"All right; only it's the first thing we've given since your marriage and — —"

"I know, dear. I'm very angry about it. Very. Besides, I'm sure I don't care if the darling prefers racing! Don't you know by this time that whenever Chetwode is particularly wanted he is sure to be either at Kempton or at Christie's?"

"Spending at Christie's what he's lost at Kempton, I suppose." [15]

"Naturally, Savile. And if he prefers his horses, and his jockeys, and his bookmakers, and even his old furniture, to taking his own wife to her own father's party — —"

"Hallo, old girl, don't tell me you haven't everything under the sun you want! Because that would be a bit too thick," said Savile, sitting up.

"Who says I haven't?"

"No one, if you don't."

"I should hope not!"

Then Felicity murmured reluctantly—

"Dear Chetwode! He's so heavenly in some ways. No, I won't worry and oppose him, it's a fatal mistake. We'll make it up to you later—stay with you on the river in August or something. What price you, dear? What's your trouble?"

Savile fumbled a good deal with a tassel, laughed mirthlessly, frowned gloomily, and then said with a jerk: "What price me? No price. It's her. You know."

Felicity replied patiently.

"You always say that, and you never get any further,—never."

"Well, my dear, don't you see—there's two things."

"Go on." [16]

"What ought a chap to do who,—I've consulted men of the world, and yet I think you know best. You're so celebrated as a confidante."

"Well?" said his sister.

"What ought a chap to do—who ... oh, well ... if a chap—say a chap has—well—a girl, say, frightfully keen on him (for the sake of the argument), and she's a decent sort of girl, and at the same time the poor chap is frightfully keen on another girl, who is frightfully keen on another chap—who is a very decent chap too, mind you ... what ought he to do?"

"Which chap, Savile?"

"Oh, don't be so muddle-headed, Felicity! Pull yourself together, can't you? *Me*, of course!"

"Oh, you!"

"Yes."

"You mean Dolly Clive is in love with you" (Savile winced at the feminine explicitness), "and you are in love with some one else, and it's quite hopeless."

"I don't quite say that. But there are tremendous difficulties."

"Is she married? Oh, I do believe she's married. Oh, Savile! How extraordinary and horrid of you!"

"Oh, it's all right, Felicity," said Savile, with a reassuring nod, at which she laughed. [17]

"I'm sure it is, dear. But who on earth is it?"

Savile took a photograph out of his pocket, and blushing showed it to his sister, with his head turned away.

As she looked at it her face expressed the most unfeigned bewilderment.

"Aunt William? But this is very sudden.... Oh, it's some mistake, surely! You *can't* be in love with Aunt William!"

With a howl of fury Savile snatched the portrait from her.

It was a quaint, faded photograph of an elderly aunt of his taken in the early seventies. It represented a woman with an amiable expression and a pointed face; parted hair, with a roll on the top, and what was in those days known as an Alexandra curl on the left shoulder. She was leaning her head on her hand, and her elbow on a vague shelf or balcony. The photograph was oval in shape, and looked as if the lady were looking out of a window. At the base of the window was a kind of board, on which was written in her own handwriting, magnified (in white letters, relieved on black), the beautiful words, "Yours truly, Mary Crofton."

"You are an idiot, Felicity!" said Savile angrily. "You make fun of everything! I gave it you by mistake. I took it from Aunt William's album for a joke. Give it me." [18]

"Don't snatch! I want another prehistoric peep—and now tell me the real person, dear," said Felicity, trying not to laugh.

"Oh no, you don't! I just shan't now."

"Mayn't I see the real one?"

Savile, after a glance at Aunt William, gave a short laugh, and said, putting it away —

"Look here, and try to listen. This is how I stand. Last holidays, at Christmas, I proposed to Dolly Clive in the square. She accepted me. Very well. This holidays, I saw some one else; what is a fellow to do? And then I went completely off my head about her, as any chap with a grain of sense would do, and Doll's no more to me now than — —"

"Aunt William," said Lady Chetwode.

"As a gentleman, I'm bound to Dolly; though, *don't* forget I always told her that if when she came out she met a chap she liked better, she was quite free; (not but what I jolly well intended to punch the chap's head). Still, there it was! Then this happens! And this time I fell really in love."

"Where?"

"Never mind where. At a concert."

"But what concert, Savile?"

"A concert."

"Whose concert? You've only been to one in your life. I know — — the Albert Hall!" [19]

"You've hit in once, my dear."

"Is it?"

"Yes. Adelina Patti."

Savile got up and looked out of the window.

Felicity looked serious. Then she said gaily —

"Poor old boy! I think, dear, you should try and forget it."

"I can't, Felicity! She haunts me! Oh, the way she sings 'Comin through the Rye!' She's simply — well, ripping's the only word!"

"It's hereditary. You're just like papa. He was madly in love with her once."

"Only once!" Savile was contemptuous.

"Well, Savile dear, anyhow I advise you to break it off definitely with Dolly. She's only just fourteen now, and it would interfere with her lessons. Besides, I know her mother wants her to go in for Physical Culture during the holidays. What are those exercises—Swedenborgian or something—anyhow, it takes up time. Besides, I somehow feel that that (the affair with Dolly) was more a sort of boy-and-girl fancy. Don't you think so? This, of course, is the great romance of your life. It will probably last for ever. Of course I know it's only a kind of distant worship and adoration, but still — —"

"How well you know, by Jove! Felicity, I tell you what—I'm not going to think about it any [20] more. I *know* there's no hope. Is she likely to sing again this season?"

"Perhaps."

"Oh, Felicity, let me come with you!... No, I won't. I'd rather go alone in the balcony."

"We'll see, dear. Now, what's the other trouble?"

"Well, I'm rather worried about Sylvia."

"Oh, my dear boy, that's a mania of yours! You're always harping on about her marrying Mr. Ridokanaki."

"Why shouldn't she?"

"Why should she, Savile? It wouldn't amuse her. And Sylvia is very happy at home; the head of papa's house, perfect liberty, and only twenty — —"

"I know; but do you know I sometimes suspect ... look here. Do you think Woodville—don't you think Sylvia ... likes him?"

Felicity sat up with a jerk.

"Frank Woodville! That highly-principled, highly-strung, highly-cultivated, intellectual young man? Oh *no*! Oh no! Why he, as papa's secretary, would no more try to — —"

"Who says he would? She might like him all right, I suppose. Besides, if he *is* highly cultivated, as you call it, and all that, it's not his fault, is it? He's a good-looking chap all the same. Face facts, I say! and if the truth were [21] known, and every one had their rights, he *may* be human! You never know!"

Felicity laughed, and then said —

"I do hope he's not. It would be so impossible! Rather romantic too, a puritanical secretary with a figure and a profile in love with the pretty daughter of a pompous politician. He teaches her Latin too. Sort of Abelard and Francesca — or something — But oh! I don't believe it."

"Abelard! Oh, what rot! Do shut up! Well, remember I've given you a hint, and I don't ask you not to tell — I treat you as an officer and a gentleman."

"Don't worry about me," said Felicity, smiling, "I talk so much that I never have time to repeat a single thing about anybody — to the wrong person."

"I know. Will you dine with us to-morrow, as Chetwode's out of town?"

"No, Savile darling, I can't. I'm dining with Mrs. Ogilvie. You needn't mention it."

Savile arranged his tie in the mirror, and said in his slow, impressive way —

"I don't mention things. But the Governor doesn't care for that go-ahead set. And he's not wrong, either."

"We're only going to dine at Ranelagh, — to try her new motor, dear," said Felicity coaxingly.

"Does Chetwode know?" [22]

"I thought you knew he was at Newmarket."

"Well! Take it as you like, and think me an interfering ass if you choose, but if I were you I'd somehow get Chetwode back from Newmarket, — and not go about so much with Mrs. Ogilvie."

"Why not, Savile?"

"Well, I shouldn't begin that drifting apart business, *just* yet. It's really rather rot, quite so soon. You're too young, and so on — been married a year, and I'm hanged if he's not fond of you still! Why do it? That's what I say — —"



"A person may be very devoted, *and* a perfect husband, and sweet in every way, and not dream of drifting apart for ages and ages, and yet want to see Tobacco Trust run, darling!"

"I know, — and I've put my last shilling on Penultimate!"

"Naughty boy! I hope it was really your last shilling, — not your last sovereign!"

He laughed, kissed her, and walked downstairs, softly humming to himself, "Gin a body meet a body...."

When he had gone, Felicity looked quite sensible for a little while as she pondered indulgently on the weaknesses of her husband, cheerfully on the troubles of her brother, and with some real sisterly anxiety concerning the alarming attractions of Frank Woodville.

[23]



## CHAPTER II

### THE TRIALS OF WOODVILLE

Several hours of the morning had been passed by Woodville in an occupation that, one might think, would easily pall on a spirited young man—addressing envelopes and filling in invitation cards. The cards stated with tedious repetition that Miss Crofton and Sir James Crofton, M.P., would be At Home on the 30th April at ten o'clock. In the left-hand corner were the words, "Herr Yung's White Viennese Orchestra."

Woodville's desk was close to the long French window, which opened on to a charming garden. From this garden came the sound of excited twitterings of birds and other pleasant suggestions of spring. Suddenly a tall and graceful young girl, with hair like sunshine, came up to the open window and smiled at him. She held up to show him some wonderful mauve and blue hyacinths that she carried, and then passed on. Woodville sighed. *It* was too symbolic. The [24] scent lingered. Like a half-remembered melody, it seemed to have the insidious power of recalling something in the past that was too wonderful ever to have happened, and of suggesting vague hopes of the most improbable joys. Sylvia seemed to the young man the incarnation of April. He put down his pen, and shaded his eyes with his hand. Then the inner door from the hall opened, and a pompous but genial voice exclaimed with heavy briskness—

"Well, Woodville, finished, eh?"

"Not yet, Sir James, but I can go on later, if you want me now."

The secretary spoke with a deference that seemed surprising. He did not look like a man who would be supple to an employer, or obsequious to any one—even a woman.

"No hurry, no hurry," said Sir James, with that air of self-denial that conveys the urgent necessity of intense speed. He was a handsome old man, with thick grey hair, a white military moustache, bushy dark eyebrows, and in his eyes that humorous twinkle that is so often seen in those men of the last generation who are most devoid of a sense of humour. Sir James was liable to the irritable changes of mood that would nowadays be called neurotic or highly

strung, but was in his young days merely put down as bad temper. He had a high estimation [25] of his mental powers, and a poor opinion of those who did not share this estimation. He took a special pride in his insight into character, and in that instinctive penetration that is said to enable its fortunate possessor to see as far through a brick wall as most people. (A modest ambition, when all is said and done!) His contemporaries liked him: at least, they smiled when his name was mentioned. He was warm-hearted and generous; he had a curious mania for celebrities; was a hospitable host, a tedious guest, and a loyal friend. His late wife (who was lovely, but weary) had always described him in one word. The word was "trying".

Sir James sat down slowly on a depressed leather uneasy chair, and said, "Presently I want you to take notes of a speech I intend making in the House on Russia—I mean the present situation in Russia," he added instructively.

"Of course," said Woodville, trying to look intelligently sympathetic, and restraining his inclination to say that he had not expected a speech at this time of day on our victories in the Crimea.

"Do let's have the speech while it's fresh in your mind. I can easily return to this afterwards, Sir James."

"Later on, later on; when it's more matured [26] —more matured...." He pondered a few moments about nothing whatever, and then said, "Sent a card to Roy Beaumont, the young inventor? That's right. That boy has a future. Mark my words, he has a future before him."

"Oh! I thought it had begun some time ago, and was still going on. He is quite twenty-three, isn't he?" asked Frank.

"About that—about that. He's a young man with Ideas, Woodville."

"Yes. I heard he had grown tired of button-holes, and is thinking of training a creeper to crawl up the lapel of his coat."

"An original notion," said Sir James judicially. "If practicable. And what else did he invent?"