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MRS. KORNER SINS HER
MERCIES

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Jerome K. Jerome

Mrs. Korner Sins Her Mercies

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“I do mean it,” declared Mrs. Korner, “I like a man to be a man.”

“But you would not like Christopher – I mean Mr. Korner – to be that sort of man,” suggested her bosom friend.

“I don’t mean that I should like it if he did it often. But I should like to feel that he was able to be that sort of man. – Have you told your master that breakfast is ready?” demanded Mrs. Korner of the domestic staff, entering at the moment with three boiled eggs and a teapot.

“Yus, I’ve told ‘im,” replied the staff indignantly.

The domestic staff at Acacia Villa, Ravenscourt Park, lived in a state of indignation. It could be heard of mornings and evenings saying its prayers indignantly.

“What did he say?”

“Said ‘e’ll be down the moment ‘e’s dressed.”

“Nobody wants him to come before,” commented Mrs. Korner. “Answered me that he was putting on his collar when I

called up to him five minutes ago.”

“Answer yer the same thing now, if yer called up to ‘im agen, I ‘spect,” was the opinion of the staff. “Was on ‘is ‘ands and knees when I looked in, scooping round under the bed for ‘is collar stud.”

Mrs. Korner paused with the teapot in her hand. “Was he talking?”

“Talkin’? Nobody there to talk to; I ‘adn’t got no time to stop and chatter.”

“I mean to himself,” explained Mrs. Korner. “He – he wasn’t swearing?” There was a note of eagerness, almost of hope, in Mrs. Korner’s voice.

“Swearin’! ‘E! Why, ‘e don’t know any.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Korner. “That will do, Harriet; you may go.”

Mrs Korner put down the teapot with a bang. “The very girl,” said Mrs. Korner bitterly, “the very girl despises him.”

“Perhaps,” suggested Miss Greene, “he had been swearing and had finished.”

But Mrs. Korner was not to be comforted. “Finished! Any other man would have been swearing all the time.”

“Perhaps,” suggested the kindly bosom friend, ever the one to plead the cause of the transgressor, “perhaps he was swearing, and she did not hear him. You see, if he had his head well underneath the bed – ”

The door opened.

“Sorry I am late,” said Mr. Korner, bursting cheerfully into the room. It was a point with Mr. Korner always to be cheerful in the morning. “Greet the day with a smile and it will leave you with a blessing,” was the motto Mrs. Korner, this day a married woman of six months and three weeks standing had heard her husband murmur before getting out of bed on precisely two hundred and two occasions. The Motto entered largely into the scheme of Mr. Korner’s life. Written in fine copperplate upon cards all of the same size, a choice selection counselled him each morning from the rim of his shaving-glass.

“Did you find it?” asked Mrs. Korner.

“It is most extraordinary,” replied Mr. Korner, as he seated himself at the breakfast-table. “I saw it go under the bed with my own eyes. Perhaps – ”

“Don’t ask me to look for it,” interrupted Mrs. Korner. “Crawling about on their hands and knees, knocking their heads against iron bedsteads, would be enough to make some people swear.” The emphasis was on the “some.”

“It is not bad training for the character,” hinted Mr. Korner, “occasionally to force oneself to perform patiently tasks calculated – ”

“If you get tied up in one of those long sentences of yours, you will never get out in time to eat your breakfast,” was the fear of Mrs. Korner.

“I should be sorry for anything to happen to it,” remarked Mr. Korner, “its intrinsic value may perhaps – ”

“I will look for it after breakfast,” volunteered the amiable Miss Greene. “I am good at finding things.”

“I can well believe it,” the gallant Mr. Korner assured her, as with the handle of his spoon he peeled his egg. “From such bright eyes as yours, few – ”

“You’ve only got ten minutes,” his wife reminded him. “Do get on with your breakfast.”

“I should like,” said Mr. Korner, “to finish a speech occasionally.”

“You never would,” asserted Mrs. Korner.

“I should like to try,” sighed Mr. Korner, “one of these days – ”

“How did you sleep, dear? I forgot to ask you,” questioned Mrs. Korner of the bosom friend.

“I am always restless in a strange bed the first night,” explained Miss Greene. “I daresay, too, I was a little excited.”

“I could have wished,” said Mr. Korner, “it had been a better example of the delightful art of the dramatist. When one goes but seldom to the theatre – ”

“One wants to enjoy oneself” interrupted Mrs. Korner.

“I really do not think,” said the bosom friend, “that I have ever laughed so much in all my life.”

“It was amusing. I laughed myself,” admitted Mr. Korner. “At the same time I cannot help thinking that to treat drunkenness as a theme – ”

“He wasn’t drunk,” argued Mrs. Korner, “he was just jovial.”

“My dear!” Mr. Korner corrected her, “he simply couldn’t

stand.”

“He was much more amusing than some people who can,” retorted Mrs. Korner.

“It is possible, my dear Aimee,” her husband pointed out to her, “for a man to be amusing without being drunk; also for a man to be drunk without – ”

“Oh, a man is all the better,” declared Mrs. Korner, “for letting himself go occasionally.”

“My dear – ”

“You, Christopher, would be all the better for letting yourself go – occasionally.”

“I wish,” said Mr. Korner, as he passed his empty cup, “you would not say things you do not mean. Anyone hearing you – ”

“If there’s one thing makes me more angry than another,” said Mrs. Korner, “it is being told I say things that I do not mean.”

“Why say them then?” suggested Mr. Korner.

“I don’t. I do – I mean I do mean them,” explained Mrs. Korner.

“You can hardly mean, my dear,” persisted her husband, “that you really think I should be all the better for getting drunk – even occasionally.”

“I didn’t say drunk; I said ‘going it.’”

“But I do ‘go it’ in moderation,” pleaded Mr. Korner, “‘Moderation in all things,’ that is my motto.”

“I know it,” returned Mrs. Korner.

“A little of everything and nothing – ” this time Mr. Korner

interrupted himself. "I fear," said Mr. Korner, rising, "we must postpone the further discussion of this interesting topic. If you would not mind stepping out with me into the passage, dear, there are one or two little matters connected with the house – "

Host and hostess squeezed past the visitor and closed the door behind them. The visitor continued eating.

"I do mean it," repeated Mrs. Korner, for the third time, reseating herself a minute later at the table. "I would give anything – anything," reiterated the lady recklessly, "to see Christopher more like the ordinary sort of man."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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