



Love in the Abbey
OR,
Lady Ethel's Rival

CHAPTER XXXIV.
FOR REVENGE.

She looks at him, silent for a moment, as if gathering calmness sufficient for speech, then she says, with clear voice, each word distinct and metallic:

"Do you—ask me—to marry you?" His face flushes, and the light, the eager light of hope, rushes into his eyes.

"Kitty!" is all he can say. "Suppose," she says, with a hard smile, "I were to take you at your word?"

"Then you would make me the happiest man in the world!" he says. "I don't know that," she retorts, with cruel sarcasm. "Do not be too sure of that."

"I am sure," he says. "Kitty, do not mock me. I ask you, I pray you to be my wife! There is nothing I will not do, that lies within my power, to make you happy."

She looks down at him with a smile of incredulity. Happy! she will not marry him for happiness. Why does he harp on this word so? She will marry him for revenge—to show him that she is not fretting her heart out because he has deserted her—to show him that she, too, can be fierce and easily moved to change.

"Kitty, be my wife! I am neither rich nor poor; I have nothing of his rank and fame; more, I am ambitious only of your love. I am not worth one thought from you, but, at least, I love you, and I am true. Kitty, will you be my wife?"

She draws up her head and looks at him silent for a moment, then she droops on the saddle and holds out her hand.

"Yes," she says, "I will be your wife—on one condition," she adds, her face scarlet for an instant, then deadly pale.

"Condition," he breathes, as he presses her hand; "condition?" fearfully and anxiously. "What is it?" She does not avert her face—she looks at him with strained, absorbed intentness.

"That," she says grimly, "that—you—marry me soon!"

A bewildered, dazed expression settles on his face, as of a man who has heard too suddenly that he is heir to enormous wealth, then a great joy glitters in his eyes, for he has caught her meaning.

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"Yes," he says—"yes! it shall be so; as soon as you will let me, my darling! Say when, Kitty, love. Ah, if it were possible to-morrow—the day after! Yes," for her eyes have lowered and sunk beneath his question, "the day after! It shall be; I can manage it. Trust all to me, my darling. Yes, Kitty, we will stan him! Little does he think—I fancy he would not be so self-satisfied as he is if he could dream or guess it!—that before he has made Lady Ethel his countess, you will have become mine and have forgotten him!"

Perhaps it is the excitement, perchance the suddenness of this change which has thrown a lurid glare—it cannot be called a beam of sunlight—over the dark sky; but be the cause what it may, there is a tinge of color upon Kitty's face, which, though it may be hectic rather than healthy, is an improvement upon the strained, pallid countenance, which had looked down upon him when she, first rode up.

For the convenience of conversation she has slipped from the saddle, and leading Jack by the bridle—she had throughout shown an unreasonable impatience of the whole proceeding, and even now threw up his head at times, and neighed an indignant protest at her inaction—leading Jack by the bridle, she walks beside this new lover. He, watching her face with all the anxious attention of a man in his position, is quick to notice the change in her, and welcomes it with a sigh of relief, and a smile of hope.

"I am afraid," he says tenderly, "that you have found the last week tiresome and boring; if you know how constantly I thought of you; how often, night and day, I have pictured you sitting in that little, silent drawing-room, or walking among your roses, alone and weary—"

"Not always alone," she interrupts him, and speaking with a musing bitterness. "Not always alone—papa is awake—sometimes, and then I read the papers to him—all the speeches the men make who want to get into Parliament, and the letters of the men who don't want them to get there; interesting, is it not?"

"My poor darling!" "And then we have visitors," she says, still more to herself than to him. "Mr. Sedgwick, the clergyman, who keeps pigs, and talks about them; I suppose he has grown so tired of trying to cure souls that he has turned his attention to curing bacon!" and she smiles, not the old, merry smile, but so dry, and sarcastic, and hard a one, that it makes the speech sound not clever but ill-natured. "Then the Pophams—they came—"

"Why did you see them?" he asks. "Why should I not?" she demands, lowering her eyes, as brilliant in color and as hectic as her cheek. "They came to see me at the stake—gathered round as the Indians do when they have a victim at the torture. I couldn't refuse them the pelasure—one of the few pleasures of their miserable existence—the sight of another woman's misery. No, no!" she says—"they thought me miserable, that was all; but they were disappointed. I did not flinch, trust me!" and she presses her lips. "It was very hot that afternoon, and they sat round in the hideous yellow chairs in the drawing-room, and stared at me and batted me like so many cats—not dogs—at a bear; but some bears can dance better with a sore head, and I danced for them. I never was so happy, and I made them laugh! Disappointed! it is not the word for what they felt! They expected to see me with rings round my eyes, and my mouth down at the corners. Ah!" and she smiles grimly. "Poor Ellen looked more down than me, and there were rings round her eyes, though they bathed them for her, and powdered her, and set her back to the light! Poor Ellen! Why should I pity her?" she demanded. "Suffering is the privilege of training for gentlemen; Ethel read that to me out of one of her poets. It is very pretty, is it not? Well, they did not see me suffer, and I played it out to the last. I took them out into the garden—I made them come, and then poor Ellen's red eyes and drooping mouth showed out in all their ghastliness!" and she laughed a quiet laugh of hard bitterness.

"Serve them right," he says instantly, and with angry eagerness; "but why should she—the girl Popham, I mean—be miserable?"

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Kitty looks round at him with a curl on her finely cut lip.

"Because we have an unlucky knack in this part of the country of falling in love with the wrong person. James Ainsley has gone abroad."

"I see," he says, with an uneasy flush. "Well, it serves her right; it was heartless of them to come and stare at you, my darling! Heartless!" "Heartless, that is what she said," muses Kitty, looking down at the burned grass and flicking at her riding habit with her restless, nervous whip hand.

"Who said?" he asks, feverishly interested. She looks up at him as if unconscious that she had spoken her thought aloud.

"Who—his mother!"

"His mother—whose?" "James," she says, with a tightening at her lips. "Did I not say that she came? Oh, yes, she came and caught me in the garden, and hedged me into a seat and kept me there, standing over me like—like—the mother of the Gracchi in bombazine, armed with a gingham umbrella; she clutched it so tightly and held it up once or twice with such energy that I thought she meant to strike me with it."

An oath, not loud, but deep, is muttered at her side.

"Who is she—what did she come for—con—found her!"

"She came to avenge James—poor James!" and for the first time Kitty's face softens and grows lovely and womanly—"she came to speak her mind and tell me of how great a treasure I had lost, and the injury I had worked her son; she called me designing, mercenary, unprincipled, heartless; asked me whether I dared enter the church on Sunday and pray with the memory of the wrong I had done her son—poor James!—fresh upon my soul! She was very hard on me—I should have felt it."

His face shows something of the torture which her cool indifference means for him.



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more if she had not been so red, and had left the umbrella at home; but the umbrella made me hysterical, and I nearly had a fit. I think she thought I was crying, for she told me that she could not cry, that tears could not relieve her or bring back the happiness I had robbed her of! Then she called me heartless once or twice more, and left me with—well, anything but a blessing!"

"The old harridan!" he says, with an evil snarl. "And he—he is no better! The man must be a cur—not a mere baby as I deemed him—to go home and set his mother onto you!" She flushes and turns quickly.

"No!" she says curtly, "you are wrong! James knew nothing of it; he is different from that—he is only too good to me, only too good. He did not know that she was coming; he has gone abroad—like all the rest of the world."

He shakes his head with angry incredulity, but he does not venture to convince her of James' iniquity.

"Anyway, it was a cowardly, cruel kind of thing to do, and—and, by Heaven, we will be even with them all some day! You shall show them how much you care for them, my darling!" and he tries to take her hand, but Kitty draws it away from him coldly.

"It does not matter," she says; "it is all over."

"Yes," he assents, eagerly, "it is all over—all this stupid, tiresome time is over; and now you will let me try and make you happy? Dear Kitty, we will soon forget this doleful place—this miserable, sleepy hollow! Where shall we go first? You shall choose the Elysian Fields—Paris, Italy—what do you say?"

She looks up listlessly, and shakes her head.

"I do not care," she says; "I have no choice!"

No choice! Why, if Paris had been even so much as hinted at a month ago, how her eyes would have danced—aye, and her limbs, too, for that matter. But now she does not care—she has no choice.

"It shall be where you please. I shall be happy in any corner of the earth—the ugliest and dreariest—if you are by my side."

No blush, such as he looks eagerly and thirstily for, mounts to her face; with downcast eyes and calm, absent composure, she walks by his side, graceful, beautiful, but not Kitty—the Kitty whom Lord Sterne and James—poor James!—have loved.

Unaudibly, as he turns his head away, he curses the pair of them—those men who have come before him and stolen the bloom off the flower which he has succeeded in grasping at last.

"Kitty," he says, flushing as hotly as poor James could have done—"Kitty, you do not doubt my love for you?"

She turns her large eyes upon him with moody self-questioning, and then she smiles strangely.

"Doubt? why should I? Why else—if you did not wish me to say yes—should you come and ask me—me—to—to be your wife! I am not a Lady Ethel—I am as poor as a church mouse—I am neither useful nor ornamental. Yes, I suppose that you love me."

His face shows something of the torture which her cool indifference means for him.

"No," he says, "you cannot doubt me. But you, Kitty; do you think you will ever—he actually trembles—he, the cold, calculating man of the world—he, the impassible Sydney Cathrop, trembles with passionate eagerness as he puts this lover's question—"do you think you will ever grow to care for me?"

She pauses a moment, then answers, as calmly as if she were replying to a question respecting the weather—politely, gravely:

"I cannot tell; at least," more softly—"I will try."

"You will!" he says—"that is all I ask. See!" stretching out his hands, "I am content with that. I know that I can make you love me, and I am content to wait until that happy time comes when you shall own that I have succeeded."

Then he goes on to speak in a lower and more eager tone—persuading her, arguing with her, though she does not say a word; and at last he unfolds his plan.

(To be Continued.)

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The figure, a

SH

the my poss such "I know she can't afford but I do wonder wheth self tires her, or wheth that she fusses so. I time it isn't so much t us, as fussing about the Now the woman who one of those people w overflowing health and they are always opt other people's nerves. ac On the contrary, she le learned the great lesson through suffering."

She Has Caught He

And so that speech fr something more than a stricture. It meant—"the word "is" testifi that she had learned fr well as from others, a to my mind, very much ing.

I thought of it the v when I found myself sit taurant table opposite a not like. Her voice, h manner of bridling wh her way of prefaceing a arouse unreasoning r me. And I found myse possessed of a sense o that threatened to spo And then I thought, "w It isn't the things she

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