POOR DOCUMENT

# KATE VALLIANT.

—OR—

## With -:- the -:- Circus !

(Continued.)

'Oh, Nina! your father feared——

'No, no mother! I won't listen to anything that may sound narrow and illiberal. My father can never 'fear' anything about Dr. Dacres—the feeling can't exist concerning him. Dear mother, if he satisfies me surely all the rest of the world may be satisfied.'

'I wish that accident had never happened,' Mrs. Gower said fervently but as Kate Valliant was quite recovered now Nina would not echo that fervent aspiration.

It may be questioned how she could have fallen into such on error! The answer is easy enough. Her beauty was incontestably greater than Kate's, and it had won the love of many, wherefore should it not have won his, especially as she desired to win it? Moreover, in his dread of betraying himself prematurely to Kate Valliant, he had fallen into the habit of addressing himself chiefly to Nina. He attributed all that was sweet and kind in Nina's manner to him to her sympathy with the affection he felt for her fascinating friend. And so the web of misunderstanding was added to daily by these well-intentioned spiders, until they themselves were entangled and nearly destroyed in it.

Day after day Dr. Dacres almost made up his mind to speak out to Kate. Day after day Nina said to herself 'he will say something to me soon.' Day after day did Kate hunger more and more desperately, lovingly, angrily, for news from Charlie Glanville.

More closely than ever did Dr. Dacres hang about the presence of the daughter of the house now, for he was longing to break the ice with her first, and get some words of encouragement from her. And she, happy in her belief that she was 'that all to him, for which his soul did pine,' treated him with such sweet kindness, that he fancied she had fathomed the depth of his feeling for Kate, and approved of it, and hoped for his success.

### CHAPTER XVII.

HOW NINA HEARD IT.

The long looked-for letter came from Hasselton at last. Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham were very grateful (theysaid) for the Christian care which had been bestowed upon their utterly unworthy young relation. They would have expressed their gratitude before, had not family affairs of great moment engrossed all their time and thoughts. When they explained to Mr. and Mrs. Gower that their daughter was about to enter into a matrimonial engagement, Mr. and Mrs. Gower would understand, as parents, how completely they had been absorbed in preparing for it. They felt that they could not condone Kate Valliant's offences against society. Up to the time of the receipt of Mr. and Mrs. Gower's letters, they had been in ignorance of Kate's whereabouts. But the information given them in those letters as to her having joined the circus troupe verified their worst fears. Their unhappy young relation had in fact formed an attachment to a rider in the circus, who had at one time been a stable boy in her brother's employ. Her brother had repeatedly warned and exhorted her on the subject. It was impossible that they could ask her to be an inmate of their home again after her disreputable conduct. Every one of her old friends to whom they had spoken on the subject felt this as strongly as they did themselves! (This was underlined by the womanly hand of Mrs. Wyndham.) At the same time they wished her kind protectors to understand that they cherished no ill-feeling against the misguided girl, and were quite prepared to aid her in adopting any honest industry as a means of living, by allowing her forty pounds a year. This was the utmost that either themselves or Mr. Charles Glanville, the gentleman who was going to marry their daughter, could do for a girl who had put herself so entirely outside the consideration of her family.'

'I don't believe a word about the stable boy part of the business, and the poor child shall never touch or want a farthing of their accursed money; she shall be my charge now.' Mr. Gower said this, banging the table to emphasize his words, as he flung down the letter, which he had hardly had patience to read.

Poor Mrs. Gower said nothing. She was considering how she could best break the bitter tidings of Mr. Charles Glanville's approaching marriage to Kate.

She told Nina of it first, and Nina's eyes grew wet, and her color rose indignantly.

'Poor darling! it will half kill her. She never dreams that he is less faithful than herself. Mother, I did so hope we were all going to be happy.'

'You still think that she will not console herself.'

'With whom should she console herself?' Nina asked quickly.

'Once before, I suggested with Dr. Dacres.'

Nina laughed. 'That's too absurd. I am afraid I'm not a female Quixote. I can't offer to surrender him to her.'

Mrs. Gower sighed. She was an outrider. A looker-on. But she had watched Dr. Dacres narrowly of late, and she was not love blinded as was her daughter.

'Who shall tell Kate about her cousin's approaching marriage with this Mr. Glanville?' This was the burning question now. Presently Nina settled it.

'Dr. Dacres shall do it, mother. He knows nothing of her affection for Mr. Charles Glanville, therefore the news will fall easily and naturally from him, and her pride will keep her up before him. She won't let him see how she feels it. Now, before me, she would break down, for she has talked to me of him, and she knows I know she loves him.'

'It's a trying position for us all. I wish the poor girl had not been rash enough to run away from the protection of her natural guardians, or that she had not joined a circus! I don't believe that she went after the circus-rider who had once been her brother's groom! that charge against her does not influence me for a moment. But there will always be a little cloud of mystery and doubt over that portion of her life, and her friends will always have to combat disagreeable suspicions about her.'

'Dear mother. don't begin to repent having been so good and kind to her.,

'I don't repent, but I could wish I knew how things would end.'

'We must hope she will meet with some one more deserving of her than this fickle Mr. Glanville has proved. They were almost engaged when that dreadful accident happened and her brother killed. Then everything seemed to go wrong, and the last straw was her going into a room and finding him kneeling down before Miss Fred Wyndham. Still I'm sure she has always thought that things would come right at last.'

When Dr. Dacres called that day at Blindon he found himself waylaid on the terrace by Nina.

'Don,t go in for a minute or two" she began with that delightful, happy, perfectly confidential manner which was born of her firm belief in his love, and which he misinterpreted to mean the purest friendship. 'Don't go in for a minute or two, I want to say something to you about Kate.'

'I'll gladly stay with you for two hours, if you like.' (So he would have done, to hear about Kate.)

She smiled, and blushed happily. 'I'm going to ask you to do some very disagreeable work for me. Will you do it?'

'Anything in the world that I can do for you I will, Miss Gower.'

He meant what he said honestly. He had really a warm affection for her, for her goodness to Kate Valliant.

'It's just this. My father and mother have had a letter from her aunt, Mrs. Wyndham, to-day" she said, handing him the letter. 'Poor Kate: it's a cruel letter; and, of course, we all feel that accusation against her about the stable-boy is utterly, shamefully false. Her brother's old friend, Mr. Charles Glanville, is going to marry her cousin. I want you to break the bad news to her.'

He could not answer her. His heart throbbed too tumultuously with mingled hope and fear, doubt and pity. So he made a feint of reading the letter attentively, and while he read it, Nina gathered some violets, and hoped he would ask for them.

Presently he gave the letter back to her, saying:

'It's a vulgar, heartless epistle. Poor girl? how she must have suffered with those people. That woman ought to be made suffer for the imputation she throws on Miss Valliant's character. I will do as you ask me. Where is she now?'

'I left her in the morning-room. It's a horrid task to impose on you; but I felt you would do it for me; and I'm a coward about hurting dear Kate myself.'

'Hurting her! About that man?'

'Yes. I'm sure she cared for him very, very much.'

'I don't think—I mean I trust she will feel that he's not worth a sigh.' Dr. Dacres said with kindling eyes. But Nina shook her head, and seemed to think that Kate would be very love-lorn.

'He needn't have been in such a hurry,' Nina thought, as Dr. Dacres went away on his mission—without asking for the violets.

He found Kate in the morning-room, where Nina had left her, half asleep, with a book in her hand, as an excuse for sitting still. But Kate was not reading.

At Dr. Dacres' entrance, she roused herself into animation. Truth to tell, now that she was well and strong again, the days at Blindon, safe, comfortable, well cared for days as they were, lacked excitement, and were very long. There were many minutes in every day when Kate wished herself back with the circus company. To her colleagues of the ring she had been a mystery, and her appearance on "Nell Gwynn" had always created a sensation among them. Here at Blindon she was beginning to be accepted as quite in the order of things, and she found it dull.

Consequently, she was beginning to look upon Dr. Dacres' visits as the most agreeable episodes in her daily life, and so she gave him a cordial welcome, and put out a little art or two to allure him—while she was waiting for Charlie Glanville.

'You are good to come out in this heat,' she said, moving a little, in order to let him sit down on the sofa by her side. 'Nina has been prowling in and out as if she didn't feel it; but I like to take very hot weather as it's meant to be taken, quietly and coolly, so I settled down here with a book.'

'And now I'm come to disturb you, Kate.'

He had fallen into the habit of calling her 'Kate,' as all the Gowers did, and she rather liked the fraternal familiarity, and felt strongly inclined to call him 'Dick' in return.

'I like being disturbed by you, do you know?' she said, caressingly. 'Though Nina's was the first face I saw after my trouble, you were my first friend in reality. You had me picked up, and looked after me. I shall never forget that.'

'I wish I might look after you all the rest of my life,' he said earnestly, forgetting the mission on which he had been sent. She shook her head.

'It would be very good for me if you could, but I can't expect to stay at Blindon much longer; some of my old friends will surely hunt me up before long,' she replied, misunderstanding him, wilfully perhaps.

'Are you anxious for them to do so, Kate? Do you want them to find you and take you away?'

'I would never be taken away by Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham.'

When she said that, he remembered what he had come to tell her about Miss Wyndham and Charlie Glanville.

'Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham are cold-hearted, selfish people. That is no news to you; you have always declared them to be such. Mrs. Gower has heard from them to-day.'

Then, as quietly as he could, he told the greater portion of the letter, but he spared her pride and delicacy by avoiding the subject of the circus rider who had been her brother's groom. It was incompatible with all he knew of Kate's character that there could be any truth in these aspersions upon her, therefore he would not refer to them.

At the first mention of 'Miss Wyndham's approaching marriage,' Kate started, but when he told her the name of the man who was to marry Fred, Kate gave no sign of emotion or interest. She kept tight hold of the book, with untrembling fingers, and held her face so that he could only see her profile. There was nothing to be read in the downcast eyes, or the firmly closed lips. When he had finished his recital, she being still silent, after a little pause he went on—

'You see in their selfishness they are glad to be rid of you; they don't want you, and I want you so much. Let me take care of you all my life. Stay as my wife, Kate!'

A sharp struggle was going on in the girl's mind. She had been so long accustomed to look upon Charlie Glanville as the lawful captive of her bow and spear, that to hear of him as her cousin's accepted loved shocked her as much as regarded him as it hurt her for herself. 'He was too good—she knew him to be too good, true and loyal! for this lie to have any foundation.' This was her thought one moment. The next came the maddening reflection that the statement had been made in black and white by Mrs. Wyndham, and bad as Mrs. Wyndham was she would not write such a falsehood as that. She never could, never would get over the pain of losing him. And the losing him to so unworthy a winner added sharpness and bitterness to the pain. But he would never know it. No one should know it! what blind dotish folly it had been on her past to whine out about her love for him to Nina! But Nina would keep her secret now! And no one else should know it, or guess.'

These were some of the thoughts that coursed rapidly through her poor little worried excited brain, while Dr. Dacres was pleading his suit, and these were some of the thoughts and passionate regrets that induced her to listen to it.

'Are you sure—isn't it Nina you want?' she asked doubtfully, when she was obliged to speak at last.

'I never wanted anyone till I saw you, and I've never ceased wanting you from that moment,' he said truthfully.

'Fancy going on 'wanting' in silence so long and behaving all the time just as if you hadn't wanted me. I always thought it was Nina,' she repeated pensively, but she was too loyal to word the fear she had that Nina had thought the same.

'But now you know, you believe me, don't you, that it hasn't been Miss Gower?' And then he added something foolish, relative to the impossibility of loving Miss Gower or Miss anyone else after having once seen Kate.

'What will your sisters say?'

'That's a subject I can't bring myself to consider,' he laughed, for when Kate began to argue and question, he fancied his cause half won.

But wrenching Charlie Glanville out of her heart, Kate had also wrenched out all the romance that had ever been in her. She would be nothing henceforth

'But it's a subject we must both consider, if I am to be your wife'—here he took her hand, and she let him do it—'Your sisters are well off, and they live with you and help you. Now I'm ill-off, and if I live with you I can't help you. I shan't take that forty pounds, which they so liberally offer 'to aid me in gaining an honest and industrious living,' so I shall not be able even to pay for my own frocks.'

'The forty pounds a year shall remain in your generous kinsfolk's pockets. I shall be able to pay for my wife's frocks unaided I think,' he said. And then Kate let him understand that she would consider herself engaged to him, but distinctly forbade anything like love-making.

'You'll go on coming here just as usual till it is convenient to think about being married, and till then we'll make no difference. It's been a peaceful time at Blindon. I don't want it altered one bit so we'll go on just as we have gone on all the time—only I'll tell Mrs. Gower and Nina that we're going to be married—no one else.'

She was saying this in her firm, clear tones as Nina walked in through the open French window and it never occurred to Kate to lower her voice.

So Nina heard it.

Even if she had not heard it, she would have read it in the man's happy free, and successful bearing. He had won his love! All Nina had to do was to bear the loss of hers.

Every true woman plays this painful part well. It may be played in a thousand ways, but a real woman's conception of the way she shall render it before the public is always the right one.

It remains to be seen how Nina played hers.

### CHAPTER XVIII.

CHARLIE BURIES HIS DEAD.

There was a good deal of consternation which found expression in a great variety of inconsequent and ill natured suggestions, when it was first discovered that Kate Valliant had left her home. For two or three days Mrs. Wyndham, under pretext of 'avoiding a scandal,' and sparing Kate's character, kept the fact of the girl's flight as secret as she could.

To the servants she said that 'most likely Miss Valliant had gone up to the Carroll's.' To her husband, who was absent in London, she wrote in apparently great distress, 'fearing that some terrible disgrace had fallen upon the girl.'

To Charlie Glanville, when he came in frantic haste and anxiety, having 'heard a vain rumor that Miss Valliant had eloped,' Mrs. Wyndham murmured words of caution,

'Don't push enquiry too far, Mr. Glanville; if you do we may hear what would be infinitely distressing to all who have ever known her. From the fact of her having taken the horse with her, I fear there is no doubt but that she has fled to her circus rider. Really, the best thing that we can hope for her now is that they may be married, and leave the country'

'It's too horrible to be true,' he said, but he shrank from the task of trying to prove it false in his dread of verifying it.

When Mr. Wyndham came home, he took a graver view of it, censured his wife severely for the limp and lagging search she had instituted, and advestised rewards in two or three London and local journals. The rewards were not worth as much as the girl's horsemanship, the mare, and the jewellery. Accordingly when they were read by the manager of the circus and his wife, they surely smiled at one another and said nothing.

As for Charlie Glanville, the innendoes and ghastly hints, and fears, and doubts that were soon scattered about in all directions concerning Kate and the motive of her flight, so hurt his love, and pride, and honor, that he soon came to shrink from the sound of her name as from a stinging blow. The thought of her—of what she had been, and what probably she was now!—at best the wife of a coarse, uneducated groom—drove him so wild with pain, and shame for her, and regret for her, that he strove his hardest never to think of her at all.

But this was a difficult matter; Kate had been mixed up happily with the best and happiest and purest part of his life. She had always been as a star to him! and now he was made to believe the star had fallen, and fallen so low. He tried to take an absorbing interest in his business. But the business of chemical manure making was not absorbing to him when he was away from the works, and as his duty did not lie in the midst of the works, he was rarely absorbed by the contemplation of the subject scientifically, and on every other ground save that of money making it was dull.

He knew himself to be an object of derision now—or at least he fancied that he was (and as far as feeling is concerned is as bad)—to many of the men who had formerly coveted the place he held with Kate Valliant, for it is a fact that even men who had known her were inclined to believe the worst of her, and generally 'pull her down,'—so much color had she unhappily given to evil reports, by that ill-advised flight of hers. If he could have struck a definite blow on her behalf, or given the lie definitely to the slander that was afloat respecting her, he would have done it gladly. But unfortunately the 'lie that is half a truth is ever the blackest of lies' and there was this much truth in the report that there was a circus-rider with whom Kate Vallifant had been friendly, and about whom her brother's betrothed had cautioned him. He could not shake off or disentangle the minds of others as well as himself from the mists of suspicious circumstances that environed the case. He could no longer put Kate upon a pedestal in his own imagination even, far less could he do it before his fellow-creatures, and exultantly call upon them to come and see him fall down and worship her.

And it is so hard upon a man when he can no longer put the woman he loves upon a pedestal. So hard and sad!

He may be an utterly unworthy creature himself. But 'a man's a man for a' that.' Being a man, he never forgets that it is a woman's first duty to reflect credit on him! After that she may consider her own renown, credit, and sensibilities. But always with a due regard to the renown, credit and sensibilities of the dominant masculine power. Otherwise the dominant masculine power will make her regret her temporary forgetfulness.

Indisputably Kate had erred. She had acted impulsively, unwisely, selfishly. She had put herself in the power of women infinitely meaner than herself, by her lack of patient endurance, and this is a form of feminine folly, for which few men have any sort of toleration. If Kate had been the fortunate possesser of a good banking account, Charlie Glanville would probably regarded any form which her defiance of Mrs. Wyndham's thraldom had taken as a display of laudable spirit. As it was he could not bring himself to look upon her conduct as anything but culpable to an extraordinary degree. And in his anger he suffered himself first to fear, and then to firmly believe the worst of her.

Soon all search after and inquiry for poor self-banished, reckless Kate ceased, and her old friends no longer indulged in surmises as to her probable fate, save at rare intervals. So few people fill a space in the world which cannot speedily be filled up when they either die or disappear. Kate Valliant was not one of the few.

There was no reason why Charlie Glanville should cease visiting at Hasselton, though the one who had been the magnet to draw him there was gone. He was treated very judiciously by the ladies of the Wyndham family. They took his coming to them as if it were quite a natural and ordinary thing that he should come, and never gave him a fright by letting him think they had any idea that he came tosee Fred. Indeed, Fred, being an astute young lady, deemed it expedient to absent herself from home a good deal on long visits to old school fellows in order that he might feel that he could come constantly to Hasselton without prejudice. Mrs. Wyndham improved the shining hours of her daughter's absence very much to that daughter's advantage by repeating to him all the alluring inducements which were held out by various people to induce Frederica to stay longer with them. Little anecdotes, illustrative of Fred's popularity with those who knew her best little allusions to the girl's habits of industry and economy and housekeeping qualifications and prudence and common-sense (' all so different to poor Kate') fell freely and frequently from the mother's lips, until at last, without being a bit in love with Frederica, or personally attracted by her, the young man forced himself to think about her a great deal to the exclusion of thoughts of Kate.

Pressure was put upon him, too, very warily by his own family. The Glanvilles would not have exactly opposed his marrying Kate when she was left destitute and friendless by her brother's death; but when she became a derelict from prudence and propriety by disappearing, they did oppose the idea of constancy to his life-long love for her emphatically. They did this discreetly, not by any loud tongued declamation against her, but by seeming to resign themselves reluctantly to the conviction that 'poor Kate Valliant' was outside the pale of respectability altogether, and by deporting themselves pityingly towards Charlie as towards one who had been horribly and heartlessly deceived.

Gradually, too, they seemed to be encouraging a hope that his happiness might be assured by other means, and indicated Frederica Wyndham in undefinable but unmistakable ways.

To be continued.


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