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Love in the Abbey

OR,

Lady Ethel's Rival

CHAPTER VII.

Some one is there already! The some one is a man in evening dress, and he is sitting on the rough stones that form a seat, with his face in his hands, either asleep or —or —well, Kitty thinks, with real alarm, that he must be intoxicated.

Before she can decide to take flight, the hands drop slowly, the man raises his face, and Kitty, with a great throb of excitement, sees that it is Lord Sterne. But her astonishment, after all, is not so great at the fact of the face belonging to Lord Sterne, but at the expression of the face itself.

Wan, haggard, infinitely weary and sad, it looks out upon the night, with the moonlight falling on and intensifying its mournfulness.

Where is the cold, polished smile that had gleamed opposite her an hour ago? gone, utterly gone, and in its place a wistful, almost womanly pathos. Kitty, standing like a statue, all eyes, could almost fancy—preposterous as the suspicion seems—that he had been crying; but she sees that the eyes are as dry as her own, but dry and fixed with the look in them that she has seen in the fox when the hounds are close upon him breathing death and destruction.

For a moment she is half persuaded that she has fallen asleep over the picture book and is dreaming that the figure will turn into a pig or an elephant, after the queer fashion that figures do change in dreams; but suddenly the figure before her raises his white hand and wipes his brow, and Kitty knows that it is Lord Sterne in the flesh before her.

Then, with the certainty of the fact, a sudden, strange thrill of pity rises through the girl's heart, her eyes begin to fill, and her lips to quiver treacherously. She cannot remove her gaze from the handsome—more than handsome—face, with its pitiable weariness and hopelessness, and with a gasp she is about to turn away. The first sign of her movement rouses him, however; he turns his eyes reluctantly to where she stands, and fixes her with a glance. So they both look at each other, with the moonlight on each face making every line and feature distinct.

Slowly, as if with an effort, a wan smile creeps over the man's lips, and he speaks.

"Is it you?" he says, quite quietly, low and melodious, but nevertheless commanding. "We seem fated to meet, little one, when we least desire it. Do not go. Will you come and sit here?" waving his white hand to the seat.

And Kitty—Kitty the independent, the self-willed—obeys the man she hates!

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD STERNE'S STORY.

LORD STERNE rises, and indicates by a movement of his long, white hand the most comfortable part of the seat, and when Kitty has sunk on to it, reseats himself. The short time occupied by these movements seems to have afforded him an opportunity of recovering his habitual calm and self-possession; but still, as Kitty looks up at the handsome face, she is aware that it is not like its usual self—that it has lost something of its masterful air of self-reliance and hauteur, but has gained a corresponding amount of feeling and sensitiveness. Kitty's face is much as it usually is, with an added touch of interest and curiosity. It is a very sweet face, sweet and piquant—a face that Joshua Reynolds would have loved to have painted; it would have made a better "Nut-brown Maid," than the face that actually did serve as a model for that famous picture.

Lord Sterne seems struck with it, for he looks at it long, and with a strange kind of intensity. Kitty is quite unconscious of his scrutiny, if scrutiny it can be called, and sits with her little, plump hands in her lap, and her eyes wandering over the moonlit landscape below.

"So," says Lord Sterne, so suddenly that Kitty turns her candid, fearless eyes upon him with corresponding alacrity—"so you preferred the moonlight and solitude to the brilliant gayety of the salon, Miss Trevelyan?"

"Yes," says Kitty, without hesitation, and adds, also without hesitation and with the shadow of a smile, "so did you."

Lord Sterne smiles.

"The retort's prompt and decisive," he says, stroking his mustache. "Yes, I plead guilty to the impeachment; but then there is some excuse for me—I have suffered so many brilliant gatherings; I am so much older than you, Miss Kitty, that I may be permitted a natural desire to escape for a while. This is not my first dinner party."

"And it is mine—that is what you mean to say," says Kitty, with her little frown.

Her inexperience of the world, and the sparse number of years she has been in it, are weak points with Kitty. If you want to offend her, remind her that she is young. Ah, me! in a few years' time the accusation will be a compliment.

"Exactly," says Lord Sterne, "and that being the case, I should have thought—pardon me if I am presumptuous—that the thing would have possessed some charm for you."

Kitty is silent, and stares out at the river with the same frown.

"I know," he continues, with a slight movement at the corners of his mouth that Kitty knows so well and resents so deeply, "I know you are a lover of nature, and I commend the taste that preferred the pure effulgence of the moon to the garish glitter of a hundred candles."

Kitty turns her face, dimpled with a mischievous smile.

"That sounds exactly like the conversation that the gentleman talk in a novel I found in the library at home!" she says. "It is very pretty, but it isn't true, more's the pity. I came out to see the kittens—Mrs. Saville's kittens. Are you fond of kittens?"

My Lord Sterne, the great political light of the day, leans forward with an air of interest; evidently Kitty is not quite the girl to take kindly to sentiment in any form.

"Kittens!" he says. "Yes, I am very fond of kittens. There is a drawback to the pleasure of their society, however—they scratch."

"Don't they!" responds Kitty, with her little laugh. "Look here!" and in her girlish, natural way she holds out her arms.

Lord Sterne looks at her with a sharp flash of his gray eyes; unconsciously she has swerved into an attitude graceful enough for an Athenian statue. Is she unconscious? Quite, he assures himself confidently, and being thus convinced he takes the hand nearest him, as a matter of course, and examines the long red line that stands out so plainly on the white, perfectly molded arm.

"You had almost better have remained in the salon," he says, looking up from the arm. "At least, no one would have scratched you there."

Kitty laughs; then, as he has forgotten to release her hand, she simply withdraws it. As she does so there flashes across her mind Lady Ellesford's description of the man sitting beside her at the present moment.

"No," she says, and though she does not know it, the tone of the reply reflects her thought. Lord Sterne possesses that rare and dangerous faculty, the faculty of interpreting tones and glances almost as easily as the words that are used to hide them.

"No," he says; "you are not quite sure?"

Then, as her eyes, that are too unused to concealment to meet him with a conventional denial of the doubt, droop beneath his scrutiny, he laughs.

It is the first time he has laughed since Kitty entered the hermit's cell, and the sound, so low and musical thrills her in some inexplicable way.

"Ah, yes!" he says to himself; "I remember. My dear old friend the countess sat next you at dinner, and was whispering in your ear—words of warning, no doubt—it is not for us to call them scandal! Words of warning, yes, and against whom? Not against me, for that would have been unnecessary; you dislike me quite enough already, Miss Kitty, is it not so?"

Kitty bites her full red lips, but does not reply.

Lord Sterne clasps his right leg in his white hands, and looks down at her with a curious smile of amusement, and—well, something that is almost regret.

"Against whom could it have been? why on my word they are all more harmless than the tabby cats you have been nursing. Cruel old lady! she need not have feared that you would have been fascinated, Miss Kitty; she did not guess that you would so soon have wearied of us all and flown for relief from your ennui to the kittens!"

The good-natured sarcasm, if so mild a banter deserves so hard a name, nettles Kitty, always ready enough to be roused, and she flashes round on him.

"You were as tired of it as I, at least you looked so when I first saw you——"

She stops suddenly, for the gray eyes—wonderful eyes that by a glance have quelled a tumult in many an excited crowd, and have a strange and masterful charm in them, say his followers—the gray eyes look through her with an ineffable composure and steadfast unflinchingness.

"Quite right," he says, inclining his head, and resting his chin on his hand. "I was tired—heartily tired," he pauses a moment, and Kitty sees that he is looking beyond her, and has for the moment forgotten. "If one could only find any one thing on the face of the earth that one would not tire of."

"Have you tried everything?" says Kitty.

"Everything," he answers, turning his eyes on her with a smile. "Excepting kittens, perhaps."

Kitty colors and knits her brows.

"You can easily get some kittens," she says, "Mrs. Saville would part with some of hers, no doubt."

"No doubt," he says, "but I think I would rather not try them; let me keep them as a last resource. And so," he says with a sudden smile, "Lady Ellesford thought fit to warn you against me."

"I didn't say so," answers Kitty.

"Not with your lips, but with your eyes, Miss Kitty. Perhaps she was right, though why? Why?"

"I don't know," says Kitty candidly.

"You don't think me so very dangerous, Miss Kitty?" he asks. "You are quite right. I am a man to be pitied rather than feared," he adds, with a smile that is one which mocks himself rather than her.

Kitty looks up with wide-open eyes.

"Pitied!" she says involuntarily. "I thought——"

"Please go on," he says, "or I shall think you fear me sufficiently to prevent you speaking your mind."

"I don't," says Kitty boldly. "I was going to say that everybody seems to envy you. They all laugh when you tell them, and they listen when you speak, as if they expected pearls to drop out of your mouth."

Plain speaking, this, but Kitty was nettled and was in one of her candid moods. If her poor father—the courtly, polished Honorable Francis could have heard!

Lord Sterne looks at her with a grim smile that makes his face look tragical.

"And you pity them for such a blind belief—a belief from which you are free. It is strange that a girl—a child," he muses almost inaudibly, but not quite, for Kitty hears, although he seems to address the reflection to the river winding away in the distance. "That a child who knows no more of the world than the newly fledged bird in the tree over there, should read so clearly. What dupes, what fools men are! If they would only let me alone!" he rises as he speaks, and paces to and fro.

Then he stops suddenly and looks down at her as she leans her elbow against a piece of moss-grown stone and plucks the ferns that grow beside her.

"Kitty, you see plainly for one so young, how clearly will you see when you have learned more of this great deception, life! When you have learned that all is vanity—vanity of vanities—wealth, fame, ambition, love. I have tried and tested them all, have weighed them each one in the balances and found them wanting."

Kitty looks up with great interest.

Yes, it must be true, this assertion of his, and the eager, girlish—womanly—curiosity gleams in the dark eyes.

Lord Sterne looks down at her wistfully.

"It doesn't seem so very long ago when I, like you, thought that to live was to enjoy, that the world was a paradise of happiness on which the sun never set. Wealth I had in abundance, it has brought me care; ambition, satisfied to the full, has brought forth satiety and disappointment; love——" he pauses and Kitty remembering that interview with James Ainsley—the one lover, at present—is rapt in attention. "Love, the greatest bubble of all, has burst and covered me with mockery and scorn. You thought they envied me—you, who had a keener perception and only disliked me."

Kitty's eyes droop; perhaps the lowered lids affect him.

"You were right," he says, "and so was she."

Kitty looks up inquiringly again.

"She!"

"Kitty," he says, with a low, musical voice that has a world of wistful sadness in it; "you are young and the world is all before you; you carry the burden of life as easily as a young colt carries his jockey's saddle before he is broken in. Keep it light—keep it light, though they try might and main to make it heavy for you. After all your life is your own, fashion it yourself, and let no other hands pretend to make while they mar it. Do you like stories? most little girls do."

"I'm not a little girl," says Kitty, flashing, "but—a little more softly—"I like stories, when they are good ones."

(To be Continued.)

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he Queen of Battle.

(J. H. S. Steele, in Answers.)

apoleon called the infantry the s of Battle. The Germans have ded it to the mere handmaiden of uns." This remark, made to me ther day by a British military of- of high rank, epitomises the re- of the new German infantry tac- developed during the present war. it is believed contain the seed rmany's ultimate destruction

m the day when organised arm- ere first created, the infantry has the backbone of every Army, and e opinion of the most competent als to-day this still holds good. development of mechanical aids rfare has led to many changes in s and strategy, but to-day, as in rst days of war, the infantry is ciding factor. It must complete ork that has been begun by the by the tanks, by the aeroplanes. If the quality of the infantry is the whole Army must suffer in rtfirn.

"Storm Troops" and Others.

hing has been more notable in resent war than the progressive aration of the ordinary German cy, and this, it is believed, is o the inherently vicious German m of developing specialist troops. e detriment and expense of the mass.

the beginning of the war the Ger- infantry were a fairly homogene- forces of distinctly good average ty.

were equally well trained and ly well equipped, and except for difference between the various an tribes, of fairly average physi- To-day they have been divided what the Germans call "storm r" and ordinary troops, and the t is that the general average has much below that of the Al-

is certain that the bulk of the ners taken from the enemy to- are a poor lot compared with the troops on which the Germans so much. The ordinary German rymen are of poor physique, fed, and poorly equipped. The troops are men in the pink of condition, forms and storm troo the ordinar This is p recent fi troops at sitions in perative a drawn, and put in tr tions. Th Allies co positions regularly

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