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Happiness At Last;

—OR—

Loyalty Recompensed.

CHAPTER I.
(Continued.)

"This is my first visit to London, and I begged aunt to bring me here; I had heard and read so much of it. I am so fond of animals."

"Yes?" he nodded.

"Yes," she went on, as freely and frankly as if she had known him for years. "I have a horse of my own, two dogs, three cats, some white mice and a guinea-pig. I had a monkey, but it broke my aunt's best tea set—old Crown Derby, you know—and it had to go; it was like a dear little baby with wicked eyes."

He nodded again—he seemed to be scarcely listening—and the impression her talk and voice gave him was, that he had taken charge of a girl who was a mere child.

"I once bought a parrot of a sailor—we live near a port—but aunt said it talked bad language, so I exchanged it for some Belgian hares."

"You must have a perfect menagerie," he remarked.

She laughed. How soon was the man to thrill from head to foot at that laugh! And yet, now it affected him not the least bit in the world. It struck him as musical, pleasant—that was all.

"It was awfully hard to part with them. I brought the dogs, and the guinea-pig, and the white mice, but I had to leave the rest behind—Oh, there is the place—but my aunt is not there!" she broke off.

The man looked round, as a man does when he has undertaken to do something which he knows will be a nuisance.

"Perhaps she is searching for you, as you have been searching for her," he said. "We had better go round the Gardens. What is your aunt like? But you will see her, of course, if we run against her."

"She is tall and stately," said the girl; "and she is dressed in gray, like I am; but in silk. Oh, of course I should see her ever so far off!"

"Then let us go round," he said; "there is no cause for anxiety."

"I am not anxious," said the girl, frankly. "Of course aunt will be a little angry—well, not angry; she never

would look up at his face laughingly, and call his attention to some odd bird or quadruped, and the man would come down out of the clouds and smile gravely.

He answered all her questions with calm exactitude, and once or twice volunteered some information.

"You must know a great deal about animals," she remarked. "I wish I did," and she sighed.

"I've traveled a little," he responded.

"I wish I had!" she said, with a half smile and a half sigh. "But girls don't travel, do they?"

"I don't know; I've met a few," he replied, grimly. She did not detect the irony.

"Girls are so different to me. Now, it wouldn't matter if you were lost instead of me."

"Not much," he said.

"No; you would not be scolded and told—oh, all sorts of things. I don't see aunt anywhere—and oh, I am so thirsty!"

"Are you? Why didn't you say so before?" he asked.

"I didn't think of it before I saw the refreshment-place," she replied, frankly.

He led her up the path and put a chair for her at one of the tables under the trees, full in sight of the elephants, promenading with their cages of assorted human beings, and ordered tea for two.

The waiter brought it and set it down with the usual rattle in front of the girl, and she poured it out with simple gravity, as if—well, as if they were brother and sister, or man and wife.

He leaned back in his chair, and regarded her with a slight increase of interest. She was certainly very beautiful. Her eyes were rather a strange blue—the blue that darkens quickly under any swift or deep emotion. The lashes were black and long, and the brows—as he looked at her with the calm, cool regard of a man of the world to whom a woman's looks count for just as much or so little, he remembered a picture in the old gallery at Rotterdam. It was a picture of one of the saints, and it had a brow like this girl's, and soft, reddish-brown hair, all fluffy and tenderly—in an odd kind of way, he felt sure that it waved and fluffed naturally—and red, mobile lips as expressive as lips could be; and when the girl before him smiled, and then laughed softly at the antics of a couple of children dodging a dromedary, he caught himself wondering whether the saint of the picture ever laughed or smiled. Then he looked at her dress, and seeing its simplicity, pondered over her social position. It was evident that the girl was a lady. Her very innocence and frankness would prove that, if her voice and manner had not done so.

"Do you take sugar?" she asked, lifting her eyes to his so suddenly that he found it necessary to drop his own critical ones. "No? How strange that seems! I do—as much as I can get."

"You can pour the contents of the sugar-basin into your cup if you like," he said.

"I wonder what the waiter would say! No; I am going to be content with three lumps. Oh, how nice the tea is! I was so very, very thirsty—weren't you?"

"Yes," he said, simply. He beckoned a waiter, and told him to bring some cake. The girl brightened up at it, and after helping herself, cut a slice for him.

"Not like cake?" she said. "That's strange, too; I thought every one liked cake."

"Most young people do," he said, with the half-weary smile.

She looked at him with something like actual attention, her cake poised in her hand.

"Are you—old?" she said. The simplicity of the question, to say nothing of its frankness, brought a full-blown smile to his face; and certainly he did not look old at that moment.

(To be continued.)



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is; she couldn't be; but I know that the carriage was ordered to pick us up at one of the gates at six o'clock, and I think I could find it. Are we going through the lions' house? I hope we can. I've been through twice; but I should never get tired of it—should you?"

"Eh?" he said, absently. Her voice was musical, but he was not paying much attention to her words. "Oh, I don't know. I go to it very often."

"I saw you just now," she said. "I saw you come out from the back of the dens with the keeper."

"Did you?" he said, listlessly. "Yes; I had been round to see a young lion I brought over."

She stopped dead short and looked at him, her limpid eyes wide as saucers, and, it must be confessed, her by no means small mouth almost as open.

"A lion you brought over! You, yourself?" she exclaimed.

He smiled a little wearily and listlessly.

"There is nothing wonderful in that," he said; "I have just come from Africa; there are lions there still, strange to say. I caught this one, after shooting its mother. It's a fine young lion, and doing very well."

"Oh, how I should like to see it!" she exclaimed, not shyly or hesitatingly, but frankly, like a girl, a child, if you like, whose wishes have always been granted.

"Should you? Nothing easier!" he said, just in the same tone. "The keeper shall show it to you."

He took her into the house beckoned to the keeper, who touched his hat as respectfully as before, and, to the girl's ecstatic delight, led them through the passage, between the cages, to the back of the dens.

"Just show us the youngster, keeper," he said.

The keeper touched his hat again.

"Yes, my lord," he said, obsequiously.

They had passed into a kind of covered yard in which were standing several huge travelling-cages. Some of these were covered with tarpaulin, and from one of these the keeper drew aside the covering and revealed a fine young lion. As the light streamed in upon him he blinked and snarled, showing his white even teeth angrily.

"Oh, what a beauty!" exclaimed the girl. "And you really caught it! Oh, how I envy you! What a lovely mane it has!"

As she spoke, she went down on one knee, and, all unconsciously, got a little too close to the cage.

Every one knows how quickly a cat's paw shoots out after a bird or a mouse. Like a flash of lightning the young lord of the forest darted out his paw at the girl. But the gentleman had caught the vicious look in the animal's eyes, and before the sharp claws could reach her, he had caught her by the arm and drawn her back. He was only just in time to save her, and not in time to save himself; for the sound of rent cloth mixed with the snarl and roar of disappointment which the lion sent forth.

The keeper struck at the cage, shouted, and let the tarpaulin down.

"Hope he didn't catch you, my lord," he said, with anxious respect.

The gentleman shook his head, and slipped his arm with the torn sleeve behind him.

"Not at all," he said, quietly. "Show us that young panther, keeper."

The girl looked from one to the other. She was a little pale.

"Are you sure it did not touch your arm?" she said, her sweet eyes fixed upon his face with a troubled expression. "I—I thought I heard the cloth tear. Are you sure, please?"

"Quite sure," he said, a little wearily. "There is the most dangerous animal in the Gardens."

He nodded toward the panther, who regarded them with a sullen ferocity, and as he nodded he took her arm, and held her away from the cage.

The keeper showed them several other animals in the private yard, and now and again the gentleman dropped a word of criticism and advice, which, the girl noticed, the keeper received with marked deference. It seemed to her that her guardian for the time being must be a man of some importance.

But presently he appeared to remember that they were not very likely to find her people at the back of the lions' den, and with a nod to the keeper, he led her out again. They walked round and round the most frequented parts of the gardens for some time, stopping to look at the various cages, and the girl chatted and asked questions with a perfect freedom from shyness. Every now and then she

would look up at his face laughingly, and call his attention to some odd bird or quadruped, and the man would come down out of the clouds and smile gravely.

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