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Love in the Abbey

Lady Ethel's Rival

CHAPTER IV.
IN THE RUINS.

"I am very glad to hear it," is the reply, measured and deeply musical. "It was a dangerous situation, even for one so—"

Kitty looks up, with a flash in her eyes; but he goes on calmly: "So courageous."

"It was not dangerous," she says, sullenly. "Yes, there is no other word for it—sullenly. 'I don't think I should have fallen, at least,' she adds, for Kitty is truthful to the last—at least—yes, I should have fallen but for you."

"I am very happy to have been of some slight assistance," he says. "I must confess that when I caught sight of you up there I felt a little apprehensive."

"Have you been here long?" demands Kitty suspiciously.

"I came up scarcely a moment since," he replies, with perfect composure. "But I was here soon enough to witness the compulsory exchange which Lord Reginald effected—"

"You know Reg—Lord Reginald?" says Kitty quickly, as if she were accusing him of some piece of deception.

"I have that honor," he assents, with the shadow of a smile about his lips.

Kitty looks down.

"Perhaps—perhaps you know me?" she asks, in her unconventional, straightforward fashion.

"That is an honor and pleasure I have yet to experience," he says, raising his hat.

Kitty sets her lips tightly and looks across the meadow.

With a gesture, as if recollecting himself, this self-possessed gentleman looks across the meadow, also.

"I am afraid that Lord Reginald does not mean to return your cob. May I ask how you intend returning home?"

"I shall walk," says Kitty firmly.

"I am a stranger here," says the gentleman, "but I think—I am sure that I can procure a carriage in a few moments, if you will allow me."

"I shall walk," says Kitty, adding ungraciously—"thank you."

"It is some distance," he hints; "I can get you a carriage in a few minutes—"

Kitty shakes her head.

"No, thank you, I will not trouble you. I shall walk, unless Reg, my cousin, should meet me; he will be almost sure to do so."

Then she takes up her habit, puts on her gloves, and make him a stiff little bow.

"Thank you for—"

"Nothing," he says, with a smile, that somehow, perhaps because it is so rare, is peculiarly striking and taking.

"No," says Kitty hurriedly; "I should have fallen if you had not caught me. Then, as if moved by an impulse, she hurries on, with a scarlet face: "Perhaps you think I had no business there—"

"I should not dream of questioning a lady's right to do what seemeth best to her—"

"And that it was un ladylike—and—like a tomboy? Perhaps it was, but I didn't expect that any one would be anywhere near here to see me; no one ever is here!"

"I feel that I am trespassing," he murmurs.

"Not that I care, do not think that!" she says quickly, and with a sudden, sharp catching at her breath. "Indeed I do not! I am very much obliged to you. Good morning."

He lifts his hat—ay, removes it, and stands with his shapely head bare while he opens the little gate for her, and she passes through, hot, uncomfortable, red in the face, and fighting hard against a burst of tears.

That this—this man of all others the world contains, should have seen her in that odious window—should have caught her in his arms! Far

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rather, she thinks, a thousand times, would she have fallen and broken every bone in her body!

**CHAPTER V.
THE WORLD OF FASHION.**

"UPON my word, I don't see what you wanted me for," says Kitty, raising her dark brows. She is perched upon a bureau in her cousin Lady Ethel's rooms—perched upon a point of vantage that enables her to look through the window over the great park that glows all green and vernal in the spring sunset. The room, Lady Ethel's boudoir, is elegantly furnished, and supplied with the most luxurious chairs and the softest lounges that the most exacting of young ladies might desire, and on one of the said lounges Ethel herself reclines, fair, aristocratic, and sentimentally languid; it is safe to say, that never in her life has Ethel Rosedale climbed on top of a chest of drawers; that all that life through she has preferred the soft chairs and lounges; Kitty does not, and there is the difference.

The two girls, so nearly alike in age, so different in appearance and disposition, have just dressed for the dinner that is being put on in the great dining room, and are waiting for the bell that shall summon them to the drawing room. On a small Oriental table beside Lady Ethel's elbow stands an exquisite five-o'clock tea service of silver. Kitty's cup and saucer stand beside her, in imminent peril, on the top of the drawers. Lady Ethel matches the room, is elegantly dressed to a degree; her maid has left her satisfied. Kitty is clad in a white muslin, the proper "setting" of which has caused that same maid the greatest tribulation. Lady Ethel leans back in an attitude of passive repose and languor; Kitty swings her small feet to and fro with an air of pleasurable excitement and expectancy.

"What strange things you say, my dear Kitty!" murmurs Ethel, raising her arm to inspect, with critical satisfaction, the diamond bracelet that adorns that white and shapely limb.

"It seems true enough to me," says Kitty, with charming bluntness. "Of course I was glad enough to come; I'd leave the Lawn to go to a duck race."

Lady Ethel smiles.

"I'm sure of that; anything in the shape of a race, Kitty."

"Yes," says Kitty, not at all thrown back, "anything in the shape of a race, and I'm only too glad to get an outing like this. Why, Ethel, this is my first affair of any consequence; I don't reckon the small tea fights at the Pophams, or the juvenile parties at the rectory. This is my first introduction to what papa charmingly calls the 'great world,' and I'm looking forward to it. Fancy the dinner—"

"The dinner!" echoes Lady Ethel, with a delicious little shudder, "can you, can you really care for eating?"

"Can I care?" retorts Kitty, showing her dazzling teeth with the smile of a gamin—"can I care! My dear Ethel, I'm awfully fond of my dinner, and I think that man—the great French author, what's his name—who said that his dinner was the only solidly satisfactory thing in the whole of his life, was not far from the truth."

"What dreadful things you say," murmurs Lady Ethel, looking at her with mild deprecatory horror under lowered eyelids. "Have you no love for the beautiful—no feeling for poetry—"

"Sometimes I may have," says Kitty, but dubiously—"at the present moment all I possess is an acute sense of hunger, an awful, devastating appetite!"

And she throws up a pincushion in the air, as the nearest approach to a ball.

Lady Ethel sighs.

"Ah," she says, arranging a stray piece of lace that had got twisted, "I half envy you, Kitty—envy you your robust health, your high, animal spirits, your—"

"Not you," says Kitty, with a mellow laugh, "you don't envy me anything, Eth—you know that you are long chalks ahead of me in everything."

"Long chalks!" echoes Lady Ethel, looking both puzzled and horrified. "Where do you get such words, Kitty?"

"I knew it was a vulgar word!" exclaims Kitty, with emphasis—"I knew it directly I heard Regy say it, and I thought to myself, 'you shan't teach me that, anyhow!' and here I've got it. In my opinion, Eth, that slang is as catching as measles or the whooping-cough, and twice as hard to pull through and get rid of."

"Reginald teaches you all these extraordinary phrases," says Ethel; "I take great care he doesn't infect me."

"Of course you do," assents Kitty promptly; "catch you learning anything you didn't want to! Now, my fault's just the other way—I never can learn what I do want to learn, and I always pick up what I don't want. Reg is as bad as that old white mare papa had—if you went and only looked at her, some of the hairs would come off her coat and stick to you; and if I am only five minutes in Reg's company, I catch some slang. Oh, Ethel! I do hope he is not to dine with us to-day—he makes such horrid faces over the table, and is sure to make me laugh."

Before Ethel can answer, there is a knock at the door, followed immediately after by the opening thereof, and the appearance of a boy's rough head and honest, mischievous face.

"Hello, you girls! where's Kitty? Oh, there you are!" And, with a grin at the prospect of a tease, he steps into the room.

"Keep off!" cries Kitty; "I'm only to be looked at."

"Visitors are respectfully requested not to touch the figures!" Eth, Kitty?"

"Just so, therefore don't come within three yards of me."

"What are you stuck up there for?" demands Lord Reginald. "My! what a stunning scarecrow you'd make; old Giles would give you a bob to sit on a stick and keep the spudgers off the peas!"

Kitty colors furiously, and regards the teacup wistfully—there remains about a quarter of a cup of tea in it; she could pay Master Reg for that remark in full weight—she will, too!

"Look, Reg," she says, pointing to the window, and the moment he turns his back, she empties the contents of the teacup upon his head.

The next moment she springs to her feet on the drawers, and, half defiant, half imploring, says:

"Reg! Reg! that only makes us quits—doesn't it, Eth? Didn't he tease me first? If you dare to come here, I'll ring the bell. Ethel, please send him away! Dare to lay a finger on this dress, and I'll never forgive you."

But defiance is the sure and certain road to onslaught. Lord Reginald snatches up a silk shawl, and approaches her.

"Kitty, I'll turn the chest of drawers over, as sure as you stand there, unless you wipe this mess off my head!"

"Indeed!"

"Here goes, then," says Lord Reginald.

And certainly over the chest of drawers would have gone, but for the timely intervention of Ethel, who, roused from her state of neutrality by the abuse of her Indian crepe, rises virginly indignant.

"Reginald! how can you be so rough? Kitty, Kitty! there's the bell."

"That's right!" gasps Kitty. "Here, give me the shawl!"

And, with a swift downward bend, she snatches it from him.

"Wipe it off," demands Lord Reginald.

"Oh, certainly," says Kitty mischievously.

And, instead of doing penance, she whips the shawl tightly round his head, enveloping him fore and aft to the neck, and then, with a bound like an antelope, springs from her post and darts for the door, very nearly upsetting the indignant Ethel, who has only just time to fall aside as Reginald, tugging and tearing at his muffs, dashes in pursuit.

(To be Continued.)

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