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COURTSHIP TACTICS.

It was about this time I fell in love, and a remarkable comic affair it was. Love is, in fact, nothing more than a game of riddles—each party attempting to puzzle the other; and a very pretty amusement it is. It commences between an individual of each sex, by one saying, "Riddle me, riddle me, riddle me ree; perhaps you don't know what this riddle may be? When I say hold fast, let go; and when I say let go, hold fast." And they attempt this contradiction till they make a mistake, and then follow the forfeits. Great care, though, is generally used in playing, and a lady and gentleman often keep it up a long time, to their very great delight, without committing an error. Sometimes variety is given to the affair by the players quarrelling over the game, or they will insist that they said one thing when they said another, or they let go when they ought to have held fast, and then loudly declare that the opposite party said the reverse of what was really said; and a thousand amusing things of a similar nature occur, which make the game particularly interesting. I was about nineteen when I first began to play. The first player I met with was apparently a placid, unsophisticated girl nearly my own age, with a form and features very prepossessing, who lived with her mother and father, and some half dozen sisters, in a small cottage about a mile from our house. I met her at a dance, during which she evinced no repugnance to my melancholy features, and, although I went through the figures of several quadrilles like a mummy from the tombs of the Pharaohs, she expressed herself delighted with my animation. This I thought droll; but it was followed by things much more funny.

Amelia Thompson and I soon became intimate, and I was in due time introduced to Amelia's papa, a retired barrister who had never had a brief; and Amelia's mamma, a patronising sort of lady who wished to be thought a person of some consequence; and Amelia's half-a-dozen sisters, fine strapping girls, with broad shoulders and a horrible inclination for bread and butter. They were all remarkably civil, for Mr. Thompson tried to bore me to death by constantly and perpetually describing at length his peculiar method of fattening pigs; Mrs. Thompson attempted to poison me by making me swallow some abominable home-made wine, she called it, but physic it was; and the seven Miss Thompsons seemed inclined to worry me into a fever by urging me to write in their seven different albums. At that time I never could bring myself to refuse any request it was possible for me to grant, and I often endured much unnecessary suffering through wanting sufficient resolution to say "No." In this instance I did not escape. The old gentleman was sitting in an arm-chair in his best wig and coat; the lady of the house reclining, with no inconsiderable assumption of dignity, on the sofa, had placed me by her side; Amelia sat quiet and shy very near me; and her sisters were busily showing me the beautiful wretched drawings and charming trashy nonsense contained in their albums. Some refreshment had been placed on a circular table close to the sofa.

"Pigs, my dear Sir, pigs are more interesting animals than the vulgar imagine," said the retired Barrister; and, as he had repeated the observation at least a dozen times within the last half-hour, of course I assented to his opinion.

"I'm astonished, Mr. Thompson, you should talk of these dirty creatures in the best parlour!" observed his spouse, with a look of offended majesty that spoke volumes; and then turning to me, with a face all smiles and good-nature, said, "You must take another glass of wine, Mr. Wag. I'm sure you like it, and it is Amelia's own vintage."

I had already swallowed, much against my inclination, six glasses of the filthy mixture; but to be told that I liked it when I would have given anything to have smashed the decanter, and to be informed that it was the "vintage" (O Jupiter!) of my adored, did not make it more palatable: however, politeness suggested the necessity of putting the replenished glass to my lips, and then, to mark my feeling towards the fair manufacturer, I drained the bumper at a draught.

"Another glass?" immediately exclaimed Mrs. Thompson, with a look of triumph at her daughters, for which, had I dared, I would gladly have choked her. "Isn't it very nice? It's called Frontignac, and Amy shall give you the receipt for making it."

"It's made of turpentine and aqua-fortis, there's no doubt about it," thought I.

"How do you like this drawing of a butterfly on a rose?" mildly inquired Miss Angelica, showing me something on a bit of

paper that I thought resembled in a remarkable manner a toad on a cabbage-stump.

"It's Nature itself!" I replied.

"Amy did it all," cried Miss Augusta.

"And Amy did this cottage," said Miss Rosa, handing it for my inspection. The cottage seemed to me as much like a coal-skuttle as anything could be.

"And this bird of paradise, too," added Miss Belinda; but if she had called it a kangaroo the designation would have been quite as appropriate.

"And she can play 'The Battle of Prague' with both hands," exclaimed the youngest, with a sort of wonder that such an accomplishment was possible.

"And she can make card-racks, and net purses, and breed silk-worms, and write poetry, and—"

"Never mind, Septima, what your sister can do," here interposed her mamma. "Mr. Wag will find out all her good qualities in time. Amy, my love! what is the matter with you? You seem dull," added she, with a very impressive affection.

Amy gave a sigh.

"Ah, poor thing! she is so susceptible," said Mrs. Thompson emphatically.

Amy fixed her eyes on a gap in the pepper-and-salt carpet. I looked as solemn as the Queen Elizabeth done in worsted that hung over the mantel-piece. But I was rarely amused. At this interesting period, Amelia's papa, who seemed as if he thought there was nothing in the world so important as his system of fattening pigs, suddenly observed—

"Mangel-wurzel gives them the gripes, and—"

"Mr. T.!" exclaimed his dignified spouse, with a look that would have awed an emperor.

"My dear, I was only telling the young gentleman—"

"Enough!" replied the lady, with a wave of her hand that appeared to extinguish all his piggish notions for the time; and then turning to me, in her most insinuating manner, said, "Do take another glass of Frontignac!"

This was sufficient. To prevent being completely poisoned, I summoned up resolution to look at my watch; and seemed surprised it was so late, and took a hasty leave of the party.

There is something in courtship which writers on the moral sentiments have not described. It is the most exquisite piece of foolery that life produces, instead of being the serious matter that people imagine. Cupid is usually represented blind, but he has only a cast in his eye; and all his worshippers are marked by a similar obliquity of vision. It cannot be denied that Love squints, for no lover looks at his mistress in a straightforward matter-of-fact manner. Instead of gazing on her, his eyes are on the heavens, and he thinks of angels; and she, instead of observing him, has her vision taken up with the principal character in her favourite romance, and sees a hero. The insight I had gained into the nature of the ludicrous made me regard things in a less roundabout fashion than is usual with lovers; and, though I certainly felt a pleasure in observing the signs by which my adored was continually evincing her kind feelings towards me, it was one that, had I possessed the use of the risible muscles, must have ended in laughter.

I had heard in confidence from her mamma, who never let slip an opportunity of praising Amelia to me as possessing all the cardinal virtues, and all her own virtues as well, that the young lady, from feelings of pure benevolence, meekness, and charity, had voluntarily become a gratuitous teacher in the village Sunday-school, and devoted all her leisure hours to the task of instructing the young idea of the juvenile population of the neighbourhood. On the earliest occasion I bent my steps towards the school, and was on the point of entering the room when I heard an angry voice in loud altercation, mingled with a sort of convulsive sobbing that seemed to proceed from a child. I stopped to listen, and heard the following dialogue:—

"C-a-t," muttered one of the scholars, with a whimper between every letter.

"Well! and what does c-a-t spell, you stupid little hussy?" fiercely inquired her instructress. "Say it this minute, Miss, or I'll beat you black and blue."

"C-a-t," repeated the child more slowly, but with sobs increasing in loudness.

"You obstinate little slut! You're enough to provoke a saint, you are! and if I hadn't the patience of Job, and the mildness of an angel, I should not attempt to enlighten your wretched ignorance." Then, giving the pupil a shake, which increased the

sobbing to a roar, the other cried out, "Tell me what does it spell, or I'll give you such a box on the ear."

With a convulsive effort the girl endeavoured to make her answer audible amid her lachrymose outcry, and said, "Puss—puss—puss—pussy!"

I heard a blow follow the unfortunate reply that I thought would have finally settled the education of the young student; but it only elicited a scream which sets description at defiance.

"Stop that blubbing this instant! or I'll give you something to cry for," said the teacher, sharply. "But it is all for your good, you ungrateful jade! Am I not striving all I can do to make you happy? There, take that, and go in the corner," and another spanker was followed by another scream.

"Tommy Tucker," cried the same voice, "come and say your reading lesson."

In a few moments I distinguished the following words, repeated in a tone and in a manner which I can only describe by saying that the smaller words were given in a high note with pauses of various lengths between, and the longer or more difficult words fell rather more than an octave lower: the single letters denote an attempt at spelling:—

"A wise—son—ma, make, maketh a—glad—f-a-t—fat—h-e-r—her—fat her—"

"Father, you dunce!"

"Father;—but a—foo-fool-foolish son—is—the—h-e-a—hea—"

"He, you blockhead!"

"He—v-i—vi—heavi—n-e—double s—ness—"

Here there was a pause.

"Well, what does that spell, dolt?" cried the teacher.

"Heavenliness—"

A box on the ear made the unfortunate Tommy Tucker cry out.

"Heaviness, you stupid little fool!" exclaimed his instructress.

"Heaviness!" repeated the boy, rather sotto voce: but here an interruption took place by a girl crying out:—

"Please Governess, Billy Snipes—"

"I'm sure I didn't!" said the boy instantly.

"What has Billy Snipes done?" inquired their Governess.

"He's been a pinchin' of me."

"Peggy Wobble pricked me with her needle first!" said the other; and he began to whimper.

"You plagues, I'll give it you! and you, Johnny Bolter, you're playing at tit-tat-tow with Bobby Bricks, instead of doing your sums; you good-for-nothing wicked wretches!"

Hearing a rapid succession of blows, I thought my appearance might afford some relief to the little innocents, so I pushed the door open and entered the school-room; and there to my surprise beheld my mild, my gentle, meek, and amiable Amelia, whacking away with all her might among a parcel of juveniles not much higher than sixpenny-worth of halfpence; while Billy Snipes, and Peggy Wobble, and Johnny Bolter, and Bobby Bricks, were, in full chorus, shrieking from the punishment. She was so intently engaged in the

"Delightful task, to rear the tender thought!"

that I for some moments remained unperceived by her; at last her face all flushed with passion, was turned towards me as her vigorous arm was raised to inflict its vengeance on another victim; and, as she beheld me, in a moment her countenance became as gentle as ever, her uplifted arm was stretched out to shake hands, and in her usual mild accent, she said—

"Ah! Mr. Wag, I am glad you have come to assist me in the charming employment of instructing these little dears."

Calling the next day at the house, the door was opened by a servant in livery, whom I had not noticed before.

"Be you the gemman what comes arter Miss Melia? 'cause if you be, Missus told me to show you into the garden. Muster's in the pig-stye, and Missus and the young ladies be a studying but-tonry, I think they calls it, in the inghun-bed."

I satisfied the matter-of-fact footman that I was the person he imagined, and was directed to the garden, through which I walked without seeing any one till I came to a sort of summer-house painted green, and furnished with a variety of execrable drawings, (doubtless the production of the seven talented Miss Thompsons,) seats, and a table. I had partly closed the door on entering, and was amusing myself by examining the daubs on the walls, when I heard voices approaching.

"Mr. Wag is a very serious young man, my dear," said Mrs. Thompson, "and I have no doubt he will be much gratified by