

"Love in the Wilds"

OR
The Romance of a South African Trading Station.

CHAPTER IX.

A DUEL OF WITS.

For, although Reginald had advanced with a well-bred smile and held out his hand, Grace was still standing at the side, or, rather, behind the squire, and staring, as it seemed, savagely, though she was only taking a good look at his face to see if she liked it—as she would have expressed it.

"Come, Grace, shake hands," said the squire, irritably, and Grace held out her small, gloved hand, which Reginald took and bent over respectfully.

"We shall be good friends, I have no doubt," he said, "that is, if Miss Grace is willing."

Grace nodded, but not very cheerfully, and then ran past them both upstairs.

The squire looked after her with half a frown.

"The young hussy!" he said. "You mustn't mind her rough ways, Reginald; her look's worse than her bite by a long way. And how's town, eh? You must tell me all the news. By George, it's near dinner-time! Go into the drawing-room, make yourself at home, and I'll be as quick as I can."

Captain Reginald lounged into the drawing-room and made himself comfortable before the fire—for though the weather was warm there was a fire—to think over his welcome and late introduction.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "What a savage! To tame her one should be a Van Amburgh. Well, I'll try it; yes, I'll try it, by Jove, for there is something about her that seems to dare me, and I dislike being dared!"

At dinner Grace sat at the bottom of the table, Reginald at the side. She had kept them waiting nearly ten minutes, during every minute of which Reginald Dartmouth had expected to see the squire burst out into one of the passions he remembered. But no, he had changed. Had Hugh been five minutes behind his time the Dale would scarcely have held the squire. Grace entered the room ten minutes late with calm serenity, unrebuked save by a "Come, Grace, lass; the soup's getting cold."

She made no reply and took a seat. Reginald Dartmouth took a look at her.

At first sight he had thought her

beautiful; now, with the riding-habit displaced by a low-cut evening-dress, he discovered that she was barely good-looking.

Before the dinner was over he had decided she was not even that, but that she was something more, remarkable-looking and prepossessing.

"Well," said the squire, after boiling the soup and drinking a couple of glasses of sherry in silence—a silence shared by the others—"how's town looking?"

"Pretty much the same as usual," replied the captain, his well-bred, languid voice contrasting strongly with the squire's quick, sharp one. "The usual amount of births, deaths, and marriages."

"Ah!" said the squire. "And how are you getting on?"

This was rather a difficult question to answer—all such questions are. The captain, feeling that the dark eyes at the end of the table were fixed upon him with a critical scrutiny, parried it.

"Tolerably well, sir," he said; then, turning to Grace, said, in his last way: "Let me get you some sherry, Miss Darrell."

"No, thanks," she said, shortly; "I don't like sherry."

The captain raised his eyebrows with mild astonishment, and the squire said, with his gruff laugh:

"Grace is a queer girl. Here, Reginald, give her some port," and he pushed forward the decanter.

But Miss Grace drew her glass away as Reginald was about to fill it, nearly causing some of the wine to drop on the cloth, and said:

"No, I won't have any port, either, Uncle Harry."

"No wine?" said Reginald. "What can I get you?"

"Nothing!" said Grace, unused to such attention and not relishing the half contemptuous tone of the remark. "Nothing! Don't mind me, go on with your own dinner."

The squire looked at him and burst into a laugh, expecting to see a flash of embarrassment, or at least surprise, upon the captain's face; but he was disappointed.

Captain Dartmouth was not to be nonplused by a girl of seventeen. His face never altered a muscle, nor did

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he took surprise. He filled his own glass and said:

"Thanks; I'll take your advice, Miss Darrell. Have the kindness to get me some salmon."

Poor Grace had meant to be rude—though why or wherefore she could not have told—and his cool nonchalance thoroughly upset her.

"Do you want a large or a small piece?" she said, without looking up, and holding the knife ready to cut.

"As I have come some distance and am rather hungry," he said, with slow and cool distinctness, "I will have a large piece."

Grace proceeded to cut him a slice, and the squire leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Come, I say, you two," he said, with malicious enjoyment—it pleased him to see some one else worried by the young hussy as well as himself—"you mustn't quarrel directly you meet. Bah!"

"Quarrel?" said Captain Dartmouth, lifting his eyebrows the slightest in the world. "We were not quarrelling, were we, Miss Darrell? At least, not that I am aware of."

But Grace would not answer him. "Uncle Harry," she said, abruptly, "give me some beef."

The squire, still laughing, cut her some, and the three went on with their dinner in silence for a little while.

Presently Reginald said:

"How is the shooting this season, sir?"

"Oh, very plentiful," replied the squire. "My men were telling me the birds were never thicker." His face clouded as he spoke, for he remembered there was no Hugh to thin them now. "Have you brought your gun down?"

"No," said the captain; "I did not think of staying more than a day or two. I ran down for a change. London is insufferable just now, and I thought I should like to see you and the Dale for a little while."

"It's nonsense about not staying," said the squire, earnestly. "Send up for your gun, and go in for the birds—they want thinning down. Then you haven't got your horse on the road?"

"No," said Reginald; "for the same reason."

"Well, that doesn't seem much matter. I may find a moment to suit you, I dare say; but every man likes his own gun."

Captain Reginald thanked him. "I'll apply for longer leave," he said. "I should like a pop at the birds."

"Ah, yes!" said the squire. "Get the War Office to let you have sick-leave for a month or two, and recover your health in the ten-acre."

Captain Reginald smiled. "I dare say I can get leave," he said, "without pleading the invalid."

Then they talked on town topics, drew a few mild scandals over the coals, and after some politics—of course the squire was a Tory, and equally of course Captain Reginald was also—finished the bottle of old port and joined Grace in the drawing-room, she having risen from the table at the appearance of the port and called out as silently and serenely as she had entered.

Reginald knew that the squire would return to the dining-room and go to sleep, so he made himself comfortable in the easiest chair and prepared to tackle his belle sauvage.

When the squire, muttering some inaudible excuse, toddled out, Captain Reginald rose and walked up to Grace, who was standing at the window.

"Are you admiring the sunset," he asked in his languid way, "or counting the pigs?"

"Neither," said Grace. "I've seen the sunset too often, and the pigs, too, for the matter of that."

"May I ask, Miss Darrell," he continued, "what you are looking at then?"

"You may, but I ain't obliged to tell you," she retorted, then suddenly asked: "You came by coach this morning, didn't you?" turning her dark eyes upon him.

"Yes," he said.

"From London?" she asked, twisting a handsome bracelet round her brown, well-made arm.

"Yes," said the captain again. "From Ploccadilly."

"Ploccadilly," repeated Grace; that's a queer name. Do you live there?"

"Near there," he replied, inwardly amused and wondering, but outwardly as calm and grave as herself.

"What sort of place is it?" she asked.

"A very disagreeable one," he replied. "Ugly, crowded, dusty—not at all like Dale, nor anywhere else," he added, inaudibly.

"What in the world makes you live there then?" she asked, lifting her heavy eyebrows.

The captain smiled. "Because I am obliged to," he replied, leaning against the window and stroking his mustache.

Grace looked him up and down, as the saying goes, and returned to her contemplation of the food.

The captain waited for the next shot. It came, and pretty suddenly.

"What's your name?" she asked, turning her face round and eyeing him with calm curiosity.

"Reginald Dartmouth," he replied. "Do you like it?"

"No," she said. "It's ugly—Reginald Dartmouth!"

"Yes," he said. "But I am generally called Captain Dartmouth."

"Captain!" she echoed, turning to him eagerly. "Are you a captain really? Have you been round the world? Have you seen savages and lions and tigers, and all that?"

He shook his head with a comical look of regret.

"No," he said. "I am a captain of another sort. I am a captain in the army."

"Oh!" she said, with great disappointment and some contempt. "A captain in the army. Have you fought all battles?"

(to be continued.)

Fashion Plates.



A DAINTY FROCK FOR MOTHER'S GIRL.

Pattern 3123, cut in 4 Sizes: 4, 6, 8 and 10 years, was used for the model here shown. White batiste with lace and insertion, or linen with embroidery would be effective. Silk, crepe, taffeta, satin, velvete and poplin are also attractive for this style. It will require 4 yards of 27 inch material for a 10 year size. The sleeve may be finished in wrist of elbow length.

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