

POOR DOCUMENT

KATE VALLIANT.

With --the-- Circus!

(Continued.)

She repeated her remark. "Why not have her then?" he said carelessly.

"I thought I want to tell you, she seemed so odd when she proposed it."

"Her oddness won't interfere with us. Her fellow servant may suffer from it, but that won't affect us. Let her come if she presses it; she may be a comfort to you."

It was perhaps fortunate that he should have so readily agreed to take Valence into their service. Lucy felt when the house door was opened by Valence herself, who looked quite at home. That she regarded them more as a nuisance than kindly was apparent. Still, that was her way, and if Mrs. Valliant didn't mind it, his peace loving wife resolved on giving Valence a trial at least.

Meantime a series of circumstances, trifling in themselves, had brought about a condition of affairs that made Kate feel and acknowledge resentfully and resentfully that she had erred even to signing in having acted on impulse and emotion in the various crises of her life instead of on principle. And this conviction was brought home to her, let it be told, by no new affliction consequent on her former conduct threatening her. It was brought home to her by the pain fully by the offer of the restoration of a long cherished joy and happiness to herself, which would involve the cloning of a life that she knew had been far more nobly lived than her own.

The temptation to snatch the joy, to secure the happiness—even at the cost which she fully counted, to another—was cruelly strong.

"Shall it be so, shall it be so?" she had left crying and praying, till the "trifling circumstances" which resulted in the consequences which forced this cry and prayer from her lips, have been recounted.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A REVELATION.

Mrs. Godfrey Wynnham was weary of most things before she had been six months married. By this, it is not meant to be understood that she was tired of her husband, or out of love with him, or indifferent to him. But after all he occupied but a very small portion of her time, she found. She had treated him so prosaically during their engagement that there was not a particle of romance left on his side to commence a country life with. And a country life unless it could be on a grand, extensive and exciting scale, was a dull life indeed, as she knew.

Godfrey had his out-of-doors business and pleasures to attend to. He had been quite sufficiently absorbing to prevent time ever hanging heavy on his hands. He had his duties as Lord Marip's agent to attend to. He had his gun and pointers and setters in summer and winter, and his fishing rod in autumn. When he was not fully occupied with these, he had his luxuriously furnished home and his beautiful wife to turn to, and turn to them he always did with pleasure.

Being so fully and happily employed himself, he never occurred to him that his wife—loved and loving, well dressed, and placed as she was—could be dull. Blanche had always posed as a Queen of Indifference, such a Goddess of Spirit, that he never guessed that her calm was more restless than the material part of her. But the more that she had seen of the indulgence had been maintained for many years by reason of the profound conviction she had, and there was nothing left for her to do but to be more than that she was still. Accordingly she sat still, and watched for the time to come when she should be her own mistress, and have no one in her power. These wishes were both gratified now, and still a vague unrest and a nameless longing filled her breast. What was the use of being her own mistress, if she was not to be her own mistress? Nothing more than that she desired to do? And what was the use of the money in her purse, since it could not buy her an entrance into some charmed circle where she would be a recognized Queen or leader, which would be perpetually widening her recognition of her claim to supremacy?

No, in her new sphere, there was but scant scope for her. Do what she would, she could not be the centre of attraction to any circle that had any very great self-widening powers. Beautiful as she was, stately as she was, interesting as she was, on account of her beauty, and stately and stony, young Lady Marip's little, rather plain Lady Marip's—over shadowed her in the circle that was above and outside Hassellton, and Mrs. Wynnham, her mother-in-law, over shadowed her within it! Over shadowed her by mere force of place and purse! and Godfrey, her husband, seemed to think it natural and right that it should be so.

It was Blanche's first experience of living in the country, and as she had not a single genuine country taste, she found it dull. If she had possessed her ambition, married Philip, and reigned at Hassellton in her youth, it must have been brighter and different, she believed, for she would have had the power of filling the house with a succession of guests, who would have been more or less anxious. But in this house to which Godfrey had taken her there was no scope enough for her to display her talent and tact as hostess. There was no motive for gathering a number of people together in a house in which there was no billiard room, and with an income that would not permit her to arrange such a series of entertainments as in her eyes alone justified people in dragging others to the country.

It was a galling reflection to her that this monotony would in all probability continue to reign while she remained in her prime. She did not go so far as to

with Mrs. Wynnham to die, but it certainly gave her no great satisfaction to see that her mother-in-law possessed one of those tough constitutions which may reasonably be expected to hold out to a good old age. Blanche felt that her glory would be palling before she sat on the family throne, and at times she almost regretted that she had not taken her time and wedded with a man in possession instead of having been satisfied with an heir.

To this mind diseased, Frederica was not the right person to minister. Since her engagement, Miss Wynnham had developed in arrogance, and to no one did she more delight in displaying the pleasing quality than to her brother's wife. Still the memory rankled in Fred's breast that Philip had preferred Blanche smart for having created that feeling of preference strengthened.

"I'll keep friends with her while she can be of any use to me; the time serving to her mother. And Mrs. Wynnham could applaud the sentiment, and ask herself and daughter."

"Why, indeed, should Fred or any of them put themselves out of the way for a nasty, hangly, selfish, overbearing creature like that poor Godfrey? He had been foolish enough to marry?"

Accordingly, Frederica believed to her sister-in-law exactly as it suited her own ends for the hour to believe. If the Godfreys were going to have a dinner or evening party, at which Fred desired to appear, the later would be sweetest indeed to Blanche while the invitation hung in the balance. The best flowers in the Hassellton conservatory, the most precious of the old family plate, the finest grapes and melons from the vines and hot houses, and the best game from the larder were (according to the season) offered to Mrs. Godfrey Wynnham then.

But as Blanche so found, that these offerings were resuscitated and flung in her face, if they did not bring forth what Fred deemed a fitting harvest, she (Blanche) ceased to regard them as kindness or gifts, but looked upon them rather in the light of bribes or inducements to do something which was not congenial to her, which they therefore had no right to do. Accordingly the flowers and fruit, the plate and game graced her hospitable table rather more frequently than her sister-in-law did. And when made the object of such neglect, Fred grew vindictive.

Once, and once only, goaded on by the reproaches of his mother and sister, did poor Godfrey attempt to set this crooked matter straight between the squares of his table.

He did it on the occasion of invitations going out to a dinner that Blanche felt sorry about, for all her best people, her "right" people, had already given their promises.

"You'll find places for Fred and Charlie won't you?" he asked, when she read him out her list.

The way in which she lifted up her head and looked at him was answer enough.

"I think mother feels a little hurt at their being left out so often, that's why I asked, he explained, hastily. 'I tell her your table is not elastic.'"

"And if it were, why should Fred desert it whenever we have other friends?" she asked.

"That I leave to you, dear. You certainly have the right to select your own guests. Only I thought I had better tell you that my mother didn't seem too well pleased yesterday. She said, at least, that you had found time to write a note thanking her for the flowers and game, but not to write an invitation to Fred yet, and asked me if that was coming. I told her I didn't care, and she got rather angry."

"Did she?" Blanche said indifferently. "You can tell her, if you like, that I should think it cheaper to buy my flowers and game from the regular dealers than to pay the price of having Fred at all our dinner parties. She is not ornamental, you must allow that, and she doesn't say things prettily enough to make her useful. Her efforts only result in her being unloved. Why don't I spend the harmony of my little isolated bits of social pleasure by having her invariably?"

"My mother says it looks like studied neglect, and she says Charlie Glanville doesn't like it."

Blanche laughed incredulously. "Poor Charlie Glanville, what does he like very much in these days? I wonder if he respects with regard to Fred, I'm sure, I wonder if it would make the poor fellow happier if I told that it was altogether a mistake that notion your people put into his head about Philip having been annoyed with Kate about Ralph's groom? I'm ready to tell him now that Philip scorned the idea. He knew Kate to well to entertain it for a moment, though I was jealous of Kate's authority at Hassellton, and tried to get Philip angry with her. Poor Charlie! I'm sure he would be grateful to anyone who reinstated dear Kate Valliant in his good opinion."

Godfrey's indignation with and ashamed of his wife's policy as she unfolded it. He saw that her intention now was to throw his sister off the poor little place she held in Charlie Glanville's estimation, and reinstated Kate on his throne in his heart. It was only just that Kate should be reinstated by the hand that had helped to pull her down. But the way in which his wife purposed doing it angered him.

And, after all, what good would it do either Kate or Charlie now? Kate was about to be married to a man whom Godfrey had ascertained was in every way a finer fellow than the lover of Kate's youth. And Charlie would be a capital match for his (Godfrey's) sister, if he were not made to feel disappointed and disgusted with her.

"I would advise you to let things remain as they are; no good can come from further interference," he said, restraining himself by an effort from saying "mischievous interference."

But he restrained himself also from bringing any further Frederica's claims to

be present at their dinner party. After this open hostility reigned between the sister-in-law, Frederica, to whom generous feeling never had been, nor ever would be, a snare, made a practice of enlarging to all and sundry upon the subject of the pernicious vanity which was inhering in Mrs. Godfrey to launch out in the way she did, as Fred phrased it. Then she generally added, kindly:

"It's not as if she had been accustomed to such a way of living, you know. Remembering that was not at all the kind of money in which one would expect such tastes to grow. Poor Mrs. Carruth was tall dependent on her eldest daughter's husband, who happened to be a rich and liberal old fellow; but even as it was she had a hard task to make both ends meet, poor woman, and Blanche was accustomed to society in very shady ways only. It's such a change for her that her head is quite turned by it."

Some way or other these speeches, uttered in confidence to nearly every one Fred knew who knew her sister-in-law, got themselves repeated—in the enlarged and decorated way in which Blanche uttered speeches to get themselves repeated—to the latter lady, who she habitually collected all this ammunition, and discharged it back upon her poor sister-in-law.

"I suppose Fred never let you believe any of the evil reports that were spread about poor Kate Valliant?" Mrs. Godfrey said to him confidentially one night, when he came home with Godfrey, after a hard day's shooting, to a friendly and informal dinner.

"She told me of them first," he said, stricken into truth by the suddenness of the question.

"But she must have told you at the same time that they were untrue, because she knew that they were, you see, so she must have told you, she never even heard of them until I told her myself. There was no foundation for them, and she knew all the while that they only arose out of my mistaken endeavor to do something which was not congenial to her, which they therefore had no right to do. Not that he need have been," she added, with the beautiful candour that is born of not having the fear of any one before one's eyes, "I was annoyed that she should have any influence over her brother, and so I found fault with, and tried to make him harsh to her."

"You were more cruel than you meant to be," he said earnestly. "Mrs. Godfrey, you set a ball rolling that has crushed down many a happy home."

"I retract what I said suggested, and my worse suggestion, only announced to this—that there should be no appearance of friendship between us, between your young lady and a groom. The wicked rumors that arose afterwards were never raised by me, and Fred knew all along that I was wholly, entirely, heartlessly untrue."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" he asked.

"I was not here when the poor girl ran away. I think mother feels a little hurt at their being left out so often, that's why I asked, he explained, hastily. 'I tell her your table is not elastic.'"

"And if it were, why should Fred desert it whenever we have other friends?" she asked.

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desperately fond of Philip (I shall never forget seeing you creep into the room in the dead of night to look at him, poor fellow, the night after he died. I did pity you so, poor girl!), and Philip idolized Kate, you know."

"How well you time your reminiscences, Blanche! They are likely to have now, it seems, if you hadn't burst in upon us so ceremoniously, Fred, Mrs. Godfrey said, as her husband and the announcement of the dinner came simultaneously into the room. 'It's always a source of awkwardness when people have a habit of bursting into other people's houses without going through the preliminary courtesy of inquiring whether the visited was the visitor or not.'"

"What the awkwardness now?" Godfrey asked, carelessly. "Come on, Fred, Charlie, take my wife, will you?"

"The awkwardness is that Blanche forgets I'm her husband's sister, and treats me as if I were a poor relation," Fred said resentfully.

"No, no," Blanche laughed, with irritating good humor; the awkwardness really is that you forget to tell Charlie Glanville there was no truth, and nothing but ill-nature, in those shameful reports about poor Kate Valliant, but having gone such a price as you are, Fred, he can afford to forgive you for being the cause of his losing Kate."

CHAPTER XXVIII.
CHARLIE WRITES TO KATE.

It was not often that Charlie Glanville "bore malice," as the vivid and lingering recollection of a wrong done someone called, but he had not forgotten that he could not forget that he had been tricked and deceived into thinking evil of the girl he loved, and this by the girl he was engaged to marry.

The more he thought about it—and he thought about it very often, even when he was out shooting—which was a remarkable proof of the intensity of his feeling on the subject—the more certain he felt that there would be no happiness in either of their lives if he and Frederica were ever united.

If they had married first, and he had found her out afterwards, the knowledge that they were irrevocably joined together would have made him as lenient as possible upon the perfidy of his wife had been guilty for love of him; at least, for his own household's sake, he would have tried to look upon it in that light.

But as it was, he could not help remembering that the irrevocable step was not yet taken, and with the remembrance came the conviction that it would be a bad thing for him if he ever took it.

He could not help thinking how he should despise her should he, in his self-satisfied way, when he stood before the altar with her, and not only then, but ever after.

His voice grated on him already, now that he knew all the things it had insinuated against Kate were false!

How intensely it would jar on his nerves the days of his life he married her—if that day ever came!

If that day came! The more he thought about it, the more he felt that it never ought to come.

For his manhood's sake, he ought to struggle against uniting himself to one who would in his estimation, render the union an ignominious one. And for her sake, for the sake of her own self-respect, poor as it would be, that she should marry a man who would not start in the matrimonial run for the connubial happiness stakes heavily handicapped by the knowledge that his wife was a spiteful liar.

In fact, to break off the engagement would be to offer her a fair chance of happiness than could ever be her portion with him.

It was a horrible task to have to tell her this. He almost felt the stab of the frontal, sharp glances, and the stinging, blistering sensation her words would cause him, as he thought over the inevitable interview.

He was not afraid of her having him up for breach of promise. The extenuating circumstances he could plead as cause of the breach would bear too heavily on her to risk having them revealed in court. But he was afraid of losing Godfrey's friendship.

Since Philip's death, Godfrey had come to lead the list of Charlie's intimates. They were sporting friends, as well as close social connections, and the strength of the bond between them was such that Godfrey would never do violence to one another's sporting articles of faith, if one that no man or woman can correctly estimate.

In addition to this bond there was another. Each man had, according to his lights, loved and valued Philip above all other men. Naturally, with the brother-in-lawship of the future to cement these bonds, they grew to be intensely firm and strong.

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