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Love in the Abbey

Lady Ethel's Rival

CHAPTER XXVII.
AN IMPORTANT LETTER.

Mary sighs sympathizingly, and goes about her task; as a rule it is not a particularly easy one, Kitty's one great fault being the lack of that greatest of all domestic virtues, patience, and Mary generally has to perform the difficult feat of attending a young lady who displays an inordinate inclination to remain still more than five minutes at a time. As an instance of the maternal ordeal which good-natured Mary undergoes, it is no uncommon thing for her to commence dressing Kitty's long hair in one part of the room and to find herself finishing it in quite another part. Kitty, this morning, however, displays nothing of her usual sullen impetuosity, and, much to Mary's disguised delight and surprise, remains in her chair, quiescent and docile, instead of darting up every five minutes, to run to the window or play with the kitten or the dogs, all of whom, as a matter of course, take their place upon the various mats in the room, to watch and, as it were, superintend their beloved mistress's toilet.

No; Kitty sits, patient and unrepining, and, for the first time in her life, shows some interest in what is going on.

Once she starts the absorbed Mary with a remark, delivered in a would-be careless tone, but with a little flush of the face that is hidden under the deluge of hair.

"Mary," she says, "perform a miracle, and make me handsome; there's a good girl, and I'll give you—sixpence."

"That's all I'd deserve for pretending to do what nature has done already, Miss Kitty!" says Mary, and instead of bursting into a torrent of impetuous abuse, as it is Kitty's wont to receive the merest semblance of flattery, she looks down and sighs.

"At last she is dressed, and Mary goes down to expatiate on the improved manners of her mistress, and Kitty stands, looking at herself wistfully and gravely. But gravity cannot remain on that face long, and in a moment or two she is smiling—with less mirth but more happiness than usual, and as she goes down, she murmurs:

"Yes, this is to be my happy day, I feel it, I am sure of it!" and the smile does not quite fade, even when Tapley meets her at the foot of the stairs, and with an air and gesture of a mute, hands her a letter upon a salver, that might be a coffin plate.

"A letter for me!" says Kitty, raising her brows; but they drop again with forboding, as upon the top of the small sheet of note paper, the words "The Grange" meet her eyes.

"My Dear Kitty—for, indeed, I hope and pray that I may call you mine!—Mr. Trevelyan has no doubt told you of my visit yesterday and its purport, and I would have stayed and learned my fate from your own lips, but Mr. Trevelyan, with that kind thoughtful-

ness, showed me that it would be better if he broke my message to you. But, Kitty, I am sure that you have known for long—very long, what it is, and what it always must be, and I am coming this evening to learn whether you will indeed make me the happiest man on earth, or send me away the most miserable. Kitty do, do let me see you, if only for five minutes, for, indeed, I am like one possessed until you have put an end to my suspense.

"Yours till death,
"JAMES AINSLEY."

All the smile that remains on Kitty's face by the time she has read the epistle could very easily be placed in a gnat's eye without inconveniencing it, and with a dim suspicion that after all the happiest day in her life is not to be all undivided. She puts the letter in her pocket, and goes into breakfast with an appetite from which the sharp edge has been most decidedly taken.

Poor James! Kitty's heart softens as she thinks of him, while she crunches a piece of toast. What an unfortunate thing it is that he should ever have chosen to be miserable about Ellen Popham! The nicest girl I know—nicer—a million times nicer than I am! Oh, dear me! If James had only fallen in love with her, how happy I should be—and Ellen, too!" she adds, with a little spark of female malice, for it is noteworthy that, however much a woman may be distinguished to accept a man's love, she never can be brought to look with affection on that other woman who is inclined.

Yes, certainly poor James' letter spoils her breakfast; she sees his round, woeful face at the bottom of her coffee cup—catches the sound of his voice in the hiss of the tea urn, and, worse than all, is reminded by the tick, tick, of the armful clock on the mantelpiece that time flies, and that evening will bring James, red, trembling, miserable, for his fate.

"What that fate must be, Kitty, maidenly, blushing, knows!"

"Yes, this is the happiest day in my life, next to yesterday," she thinks, her face softening wistfully, "will be a wretched one for poor James! Who is it says that every happy maiden makes two miserable ones? That sounds like one of Ethel's speeches—out of a book of Tupper or Wordsworth, and served up for an occasion. Ethel!" she thinks, with a sudden start. "Yes, there is the other unhappy one! If Tapley knew how guilty I feel, he would look blacker than ever! How is papa this morning, Tapley?"

"About the same, miss, but very tired; I left him asleep half an hour ago. Shall I bring you some anchovy, miss?"

But Kitty declines anchovy toast, swallows the remainder of coffee—strongly flavored with poor James' recollection—and makes for the open air, the dogs at her heels being hushed into silence as they pass under the window where the Honorable Francis, poor man, is worn out with doing nothing.

CHAPTER XXVIII.
A PROMISE.
IT is a lovely morning, the garden

shimmers in the sun, and there, like the gem in the midst, glitters the rosary, toward which Kitty's eyes turn fondly and dreamily. Perhaps, who knows, to-day again—there is only one he in Kitty's world—may walk in that little fairyland, with his arm about her waist, his gently deep voice in her ear, his head fluttering her hair—who knows!

Instinctively, Kitty's face turns toward the spot, and so absorbed is she in recalling that long, long ago of yesterday, that the rattle of horses' hoofs upon the road makes her heart beat wildly and her face flush and pale. Of course it is he!

But it is not, for before the rider comes in sight, Kitty hears a voice calling out her name with an impatient ring that can belong to none but my Lord Reginald.

"Hello!" he cries, dashing up to the fence and pulling his horse up on its haunches; "I thought I should find you here, so I wouldn't go round to the front and meet the mite," for so my lord designated the dignified Tapley. "I can stand a good many things, but Tapley, when I'm in a hurry, I cannot! Lor!" with boyish candor, "what a swell you look, Kitty!" his eyes dwelling on her with frank and outspoken admiration. "By George! I always said you'd get through in a crowd. What have you done to yourself? borrowed old Ellersford's paint pot—"

"Hush! Reg! you appalling boy!" says Kitty, smothering a laugh under a frown of reprobation. "Is that the way you speak of a countless old enough to be—"

"My great-grandmother, and dresses young enough to be your sister—that will do, Kitty; I didn't ride over here helter-skelter to be lectured. I say, where do you think I'm going?"

"Hadn't you better ask Mrs. Sedgwick, Reg," retorts Kitty, with much gravity, but with a wicked twinkle in her eyes; "she has got a tract that answers that question."

Lord Reginald grins.

"Always chaffing, Kitty," he says, nodding approvingly. "That's right, keep yourself in practice while I'm away. I'll bring you back some French slang to set you up if you should run out—"

"French—where are you going then, Reg?"

"I'll get the tract," retorts Reg, turning the tables. "Well, what do you think? I am just starting, my little maiden, to Paris. What do you say to that?"

"That the earl has taken leave of his senses. You go to Paris, Oh, Reg, it's a little too much that, I can't believe it."

"I am, though," says the boy, with a confidential nod; "it's true, and all owing to Ethel, too!"

"Ethel!" repeats Kitty, astounded.

"Yes, rum, isn't it?" says Reg, with sympathetic surprise. "Ethel doesn't often stick up for me, she generally has a spoke that fits my wheel whenever I want to roll it; but she has shown up like a brick about this, and I heard her tell the governor, that she couldn't do better than let me go. She said—don't grin, or I won't say another word—that I was looking pale!"

Kitty does not confine her comical appreciation of this announcement to a grin, but laughs until the dogs prick up their ears and yell again.

"Hush, quiet, all of you. Ethel said that! Well," with a long breath, "I gave Ethel credit for a great deal, but—"

"True, though, and I pulled a face as long as Trap's and coughed like one of Styles' sheep!" and he laughs. "It told, oh, awfully! The governor looked quite alarmed and hummed and hawed for three minutes by the clock. Then he said something about Doctor Greene, and when I heard that I thought it was a plant on Ethel's part to let me in for some physic instead of an outing, but Calthrop—now he is a brick if you like—us and threw in his spoke and settled it."

"Oh," says Kitty thoughtfully; "what did he say?"

"Oh, said that a change would do me good, and that if the governor thought of letting me go, he had a friend who was reading for the law in Paris, and would look after me! Fact, I give you my word, a brick, isn't he?"

"Hem," says Kitty, with a tinge of doubt.

"And so I'm off," says Reginald, getting into the saddle again; "off at once by the next train. Calthrop was going up to town and said we might as well go together—oh, lolly nice of him, wasn't it?"

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Tuesday's Messages.

RECONSTRUCTION AND BUSINESS.
LONDON, Dec. 22.
(Via Reuter's Ottawa Agency.)—There will be an increased demand for credit facilities during the reconstruction period and the ability of trade and industry generally to provide for itself in all needs will depend largely on the amount of reserves it has been possible to accumulate, says the report of the committee of provision of financial facilities for trade after the war, issued to-day by the Ministry of Reconstruction. The committee is under the chairmanship of Sir Vassar Smith, Chairman of Lloyd's Bank. There are three main divisions under this head, the report says. They are firms engaged upon war work from a date soon after the beginning of the war, firms who became engaged on war work at a later period and new firms created as a result of the enormously increased demand for war material. The third report, will be in connection with the third group. Uncertainty is the greatest deterrent to industry and the belief is expressed that the Government should announce its future fiscal policy and also make known its stand

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