

POOR DOCUMENT

KATE VALLIANT.

With --the-- Circus!

(Continued.)

'Yes, sir, Kate is the young lady's christian name, and tho' this has happened I'll say still that a nice young lady than Miss Valliant never set foot in the town. 'Twas here, to Quibb's, she was brought first as Miss Delarue, when the accident happened that made her acquainted with Dr. Decres, as you may have heard. I feel almost as if something had happened to one of my own, sir.

The water continued working up his prize-worthy emotion, as he remarked the expression of mingled anguish and embarrassment which crept over the party's face.

'Tell me quickly about the-- He could not get the word out, but the water was ready to help him.

'About the murder, sir--for murder there's no doubt it is, tho' manslaughter was the charge Mr. Valliant was taken up on-- Well, sir, as far as I can make out from the many stories told, the lady was ill, and her brother (that's Dr. Decres) left her a draught to be taken at night, which her husband threw out of the window, giving her in its place deadly poison from the effects of which the poor lady died last evening, speechless and convulsed. Water-cresses, sir, fresh picked this morning--

Charlie pushed the neatly arranged plate of water-cresses, reclining gracefully against a salt-cellar full of the drier table salt, away from him with nervous haste, and almost moued as he rose from the table.

'Has the messenger gone to Blindon yet?' he asked quickly. 'So an' see, and stop him if he hasn't, I--I'll not send the note--I mean I'll write another. Anyway, get the note back, will you? and look sharp!'

The waiter left the room looking his sharpest, but lingered in the hall for a minute or two to tell the porter what his mission was, and why he had been sent on it.

At the bar he paused again to narrate the episode for the amusement of the presiding goddess, a Miss Quibb, who liked to know what went on in the coffee room. By the time he reached the yard, the messenger had left it for Blindon and Charlie Valliant's letter to Kate was beyond recall.

When he heard this compromising fact, Charlie's wrath rose high, first against Mrs. Gouffrey Wyndham, for having urged him on to this ruinously expensive course, and then against himself for having been influenced by her.

If he had only waited quietly at home, Kate's recent feeling of consideration would have caused her to send him such a definite refusal when her father's infamy was made public, as would have deterred him from coming and justified him in staying away in everyone's eyes, his own included!

So the calculating brain told the heart of this lover, as he restlessly roamed about the yard at Quibb's, or made brief excursions into the adjoining market-place and streets, waiting for an answer to that letter to Kate, which he wished now he had not written.

'If I had only breakfasted first, like a sensible, reasonable man, instead of writing in a hot haste to announce myself like an impatient ass, he might have left town by the next train and Kate would never have known he had been so near her? But now she would think him a coward if he slunk away without meeting her, and he shrank from the thought of living in her memory as that for the rest of her life.

After a little time he mastered his reluctance to the inevitable interview. He recalled all he knew of Kate's sensitive pride, and reassured himself on the subject of being drawn into more intimate connection with the disgraced man. At the worst an interview with her would be painful, not dangerous. Kate's ready tact would be his best friend. She would make him understand at once that she felt an offer of marriage made in ignorance of what had happened, was cancelled by the sad and shameful circumstances now made known to him.

In this way he would comfort himself for having mixed himself up with such a dubious state of things, and for a few minutes he would succeed.

'Then dread of what the world would say, and his friends and family would say, if it ever became known that on the very day of the inquest he had shrank from the thought of living in her memory as that for the rest of her life.

Wandering restlessly about the town, dressing, yet longing for, the return of the messenger from Blindon, he found himself one of the crowd that was hanging about the police-station.

A handsome pair of cobs standing close by attracted his attention, and on asking at their leads some question about their age and breed, he was startled by having this additional information given him.

'They belong to Miss Gower, sir, she has just driven Miss Valliant in to see her father.'

Charlie Glanville felt himself recall from the cobs and the groom with such involuntary celerity and force, that he realized it would be a physical impossibility for him to approach Kate now.

The best thing he could do, since his whole system revolved so intensely against coming in contact with the crime-contaminated man, would be to leave the place before a pitiful appeal from Kate might make him seem a brute, even in his own eyes, for leaving her.

He was not responsible for this cruel overthrow of all his intentions. Kate herself might be dear as ever to him, but if her father should be proved a murderer--

The thought was not to be borne! He would get away from the maddening atmosphere of the place before it unmanned him utterly.

He began to retrace his steps towards Quibb's Hotel hastily. Against his will his eyes would turn to that horrible door through which his love had passed to visit and identify herself with her father. He quickened his steps, but before he passed it Kate came out, her face drawn with suffering, pale with intense feeling, hardly restrained.

Her step was slow, but not faltering, for also was clinging to the arm of a man whose Charlie's jealous heart told him was Dr. Decres.

In an instant the list of every man in the crowd was off his head, and in a sentence that it seemed as if a breath would have hurried, Kate, held up with tender care by her lover, reached the little carriage.

Then Nina took her seat and the reins, and as they drove off Dr. Decres' voice broke the hushed spell:

'O! bless you, my Kate. I shall be with you soon.'

And, as with one accord, the words-- 'He's a grand fellow!' broke from the lips of all the people round.

Non-sensical, her physical weakness, senselessly struggling with the nervous disinclination to face either suspicion or pity, Kate forced herself to lift her head and gaze at the man who had just pronounced that which was in her mind, the motive that inspired her, was that no action or look of hers should give colour to the idea that she believed in her father's guilt.

So the brave young face, purified by its fervent desire to do what poor honour she could to her father in her hour of bitter abasement, was held aloft for an instant, and the calm, sweet eyes pleaded unobscuredly for judgement to be deferred.

In that instant she saw Charlie Glanville.

He seemed to be trying to hide himself behind two or three intervening people; seemed to be striving to avoid meeting her eyes; seemed quite willing that she should drive away without speaking to him! Yes! he seemed, and was, all these things; and yet he was Charlie Glanville!

As he looked in her eyes changed from pleading tenderness to proud reproach, the man who had loved her so well while she was alone on her, realized what had happened, and what he had lost.

It was as no use his standing erect now. The moment for coming forward was past. He felt, as he saw the gesture with which she turned and pointed him out to Nina, though he could not hear her words, for his self-complacency's sake it was as well the wind waited her words away from him, for they would have told him that he had lost her.

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