

## A LOVER'S TIFF.

"Really, Gwen, you are *too* exacting!"

The speaker was a tall, handsome man, of about seven-and-twenty. His forehead was wrinkled, and he pulled his moustache irritably as he stood in the pretty morning-room of Abbotshurst.

She whom he addressed was a charmingly-pretty girl, some five years his junior; fair, with bright, healthful complexion, and one of the sweetest expressions usually; but now the red lips were half pouted, the graceful head erected rather scornfully.

"My opinion is quite the contrary. I think I am just in what I say. Still, do as you please; I have no right to dictate, of course. Only it is a pity our minds should be so little in harmony."

She was in morning toilet, and already had her hat on. Now, taking a basket, which was on the table near, she stepped into the garden, and crossed the velvety lawn to the carriage gates.

The young fellow looked after her, made a half step to follow, but, restraining the impulse, flung himself into a chair, exclaiming:

"No! It is her fault this time. I'll not give in. There must be a line drawn somewhere. If she loves me she will see I am right. She must!"

Gwen had already. Half-way across the lawn she reflected:

"Poor Paul! He is right. I am exacting. What can such a trifle matter to me? I think verily I plague him because I know he loves me so much!"

She fully expected he would follow, and prepared a smile for his reception. Then she was vexed at his non-appearance. Then at the gate she paused. Should she go back to him?

Oh, dear no; that would be a far too great concession; it was but a lover's tiff. So she held her head higher, though her heart was sore, and passing into the road, went quickly towards the village.

Gwen was the only daughter of Lady Ryall, a widow, and the Lady Bountiful of Abbotshurst. She was betrothed to her cousin, Captain Paul, and affairs had flowed very well until this tiff. On this morning she had intended him to carry her basket, and leaving it at Dame Hodge's, who was down with bronchitis, go with her for a ramble through the lovely hop-gardens.

But this was all stopped. So Gwen determined to act the good Samaritan in the village, and paid her first visit to her nurse, of whom she had been lately somewhat neglectful.

Dame Wyatt was bustling about in her cottage, as neat as her simple cotton dress, and as bright, as her clear apple-cheek, healthful face.

"Dear, and is it you, Miss Gwen?" exclaimed the old woman. "Why, it's just a week since I've caught a glimpse of you. But you look bonnie!"

"Yes," smiled Gwen, taking the chair the nurse dusted and placed. "I fear I have been rather neglectful of my duties. Where is Maggie?"

"Ah, Miss Gwen, that's a bit of trouble I have. The lass hasn't looked herself for the last few days; so when she said she'd just go to Winstrop for a day or two, and see her brother and the children, I agreed, miss. It would cheer her up, you know."

"So my foster-sister really consented to leave you for so long," laughed Gwen; "and—also Edward North?"

"Yes, Miss," answered the nurse. "But she's the greatest comfort I had on earth. Dear, dear! if anything happened to her it would just kill me off straight, that it would. And the girl loves me, miss, just as fondly as I do her. Only think," proceeded the old woman, smiling, yet with tears in her eyes, "though she but left yesterday, she wrote me a letter."

"I got it this morning. Here it is."

She took it from behind a china shepherdess on the mantle-piece, and regarded it proudly.

"To fancy a child of mine, miss, could write so pretty a hand! That's owing to your kindness. I can't read a line; but I have been looking at it; and I was hurrying my work to come up to Abbotshurst to ask if you'd kindly read it to me, miss? Maggie said once, if she ever was away and wrote, she knew you would kindly read her letters."

"Of course I will, dear nurse," answered Gwen, extending her hand for the missive. "No doubt you are anxious."

Dame Wyatt handed it, saying:

"Thank you kindly, miss. Just one instant, and I'll be able to sit quiet and listen to what the lass has to say."

She trotted into the room adjoining, and Gwen examined the letter. At the first glance she became curious. The post mark was not Winstrop, but a village nearly eight miles away. Maggie knew no one there, Gwen was sure. Surprised, she drew out and began to read the letter. In a few seconds she was absorbed and horrified by the contents.

"MY OWN DEAR, DEAR MOTHER,

Forgive me the bitter sorrow I shall cause you; but I can't help it—indeed, I can't. I can't bear life any longer; I am so—so miserable! I know it's wicked to say so; but I repeat, I can't help it. My head's so bad, and I'm so wretched.

I've quarrelled with Ned. It was all my fault. Yes mother dear, all. You know Miss Gwen once told me I was a coquette; and she was right, though I never meant harm. I never really loved anyone but Ned. It was, I think, because I loved him that I liked to make him jealous. But, mother dear, I carried it too far the other day, because he had made me angry. He grow angry too, and we quarrelled. He said we'd best part. He held out his hand. I wouldn't take it, and he left me in a passion.

Mother dear, I hear he has gone away; he vows he'll never see me again; that, in his fury, he has engaged himself to another. Oh! mother, mother! I have ruined his happiness and my own. I cannot live. Forgive me!—forgive me! I am not worthy anyone's love. Death is sweeter than life.

When I'm dead, tell Ned I never loved anyone like him. Ask him to pardon me; and oh, mother dear! don't—don't grieve for me; only can I be happy when I forget. Heaven forgive me, and bless you.

Your foolish, unhappy

MAGGIE."

Gwen read, a chilling horror at her heart, her color gone, her complexion white to the lips.

Maggie, her pretty, wayward, coquettish foster-sister, the belle of the village, had quarrelled with her real true love, and, in despair, evidently contemplated taking her life, so young, and, until now, so bright and gay.

The girl rose from her chair. What was to be done? If not too late, Maggie must be saved. What could Gwen do? She was ready to do anything; but what?

As she stood there terrified, bewildered, fresh trouble arrived. The voice of Dame Wyatt sounded from the inner room, apologizing for being so long, but she would soon be there. Was Maggie better?

Gwen dropped back into the seat, overwhelmed. How could she read such a letter to the poor mother? Impossible! It would kill her. If it had to be done, Gwen could never do it.

Her first impulse was to fly; but her limbs failed her. Her brain whirled, for she was losing valuable time—and Maggie's life might depend upon seconds.

Oh! what could she do? How could she spare the poor old mother, and save the child?

There was but one way. She had read somewhere of it. She would not, she *could* not, read the real terrible letter. She would make up one, if only she had sense to do it, her mind being so upset.

Quickly she drew another letter from her pocket, concealing it beneath her handkerchief as Dame Wyatt, smiling and complacent, entered the room.

"Now, Miss Gwen, I'm quite ready," she remarked, sitting in her cushioned, high back Windsor chair, and folding her wrinkled hands. "What does my dear lass say?"

Poor Gwen! Had ever a young girl a harder task? She opened the letter, and with difficulty prevented its rustling in her trembling hands. How could she ever command her voice?

A moment's reprieve was granted her.

"Dear, Miss Gwen!" ejaculated Dame Wyatt, in concern, "What is the matter? You are as white as the curtains behind you. You ain't well, miss."

"Not very, nurse. I walked here rather quickly, and the heat has made me a little faint. That is all. A glass of water will put me right."

The water was soon procured. Gwen drank eagerly, and Dame Wyatt was full of sympathy.

"Never mind the letter, Miss Gwen," she said. "Don't trouble. I can wait. The curate, he's a kind young gentleman, I'll ask him to read it."

"No, no, no," ejaculated Gwen, scared. "I will read it. I am better, I am quite well. Take your seat, nurse, and listen."

How Gwen got through that fictitious letter, or what she said, she never clearly could recollect. At times Dame Wyatt smiled, and smoothed her apron, nodding her head approvingly; at others, she looked perplexed; but on the whole was satisfied, and had no suspicion.

"She don't quite write as she speaks," she said. "The lass is a bit jerky here and there, ain't she, miss? And one or two sentences I can't just make out. But I desay it ain't so easy to write as to talk."

"Oh dear, no—very—very different," said Gwen, putting the letter she had concealed in the envelope instead of the right one, then handing it to the old woman.

Anxiously she watched her fingering the envelope. Would she open it and recognize the different writing of the enclosure?

If so, Gwen must say she had made a mistake.

No; Dame Wyatt, much to her companion's relief, rising, put the letter away in one of the sweet lavender-smelling drawers, with brass handles, which stood in the room, and looked quite happy and content with the knowledge that her darling was better.

Better! and at that very instant Maggie might be lying under the water of some pool—dead!

Yes; Gwen suddenly recollected there was no water at Winstrop, but that the river passed through Harpleton.

Fearful of self-betrayal did she remain, also horrified by the time she was losing, again complaining of faintness, she bade her old nurse farewell, and hastened from the village.

There was neither faintness nor weariness in the fashion she breast the hill upon which Abbotshurst stood—she almost ran. She held Maggie's letter in her hand, while almost unconsciously she kept murmuring beneath her breath:

"It is morn. Supposing Maggie—poor, foolish Maggie—drowned herself last night? I shall be too late. Oh! who will tell her poor, poor mother?"

Soon she was flying along the level ground to the stables, then into the house, searching every room for Captain Paul.

She found him intensely miserable in the library. At that terrible moment Gwen quite forgot the morning occurrence. Approaching eagerly, her beautiful eyes dilated, her cheek flushed, she said:

"Paul, will you drive me to Harpleton? I've ordered the dogcart round. That goes the fastest. Don't say that you can't, Paul, for your must—a life depends on it. Something terrible has happened!"

He was already on his feet. Drive her? He would have driven her anywhere. He had no intention to say he couldn't. He was only too pleased that she was asking him to serve her.

"Of course I'll drive you, Gwen," he had begun before she ended. When she finished his face had something the reflection of hers, and he exclaimed: