

A Terrible Disclosure;

What Fools Men Are!

CHAPTER XIV.

"Yes, very! I should not be half so happy as I am now in Edgar's rooms. I dread the hour when we shall leave them! But I did not come here to talk about myself, dear Edith."

"You cannot talk about me; there is nothing respecting myself of any interest."

"Oh, Edith!" with a smile of reproach. "When I know that you are one of the leaders of fashion, whom everybody knows and admires. Why, do I not see your photograph in all the stationers' windows? Mr. Clifford Revel says that you have almost set the fashion in dress this season!"

"Mr. Clifford Revel honors me by making me the topic of his conversation," said Edith, with a bitter smile. "And now that you have said all that you can say about me, talk about yourself."

"Not yet, at any rate. Are you better to-day, dear?" asked Lela, who thought how little changed the imperious woman of the world was from the imperious schoolgirl whom she remembered.

"Better, yes!" replied Edith. "Do I look ill?"

Lela was silent. Edith laughed bitterly. "If you knew it, I look a thousand times better since you came in; there is a touch of color in my face; I can see it in the glass there. But I have been ill. See here," and she raised her arm and let her bracelet fall from her wrist downward: "a week ago that bracelet would not have fallen an inch; my arm is so much the thinner. Another month of this and I should be—so says the doctor—where they do not wear bracelets."

"Edith!" exclaimed Lela, shocked and pitiful. "What is it? Why do you stay in London? Why do you not go away to the seaside—anywhere?"

Edith laughed; it was not a pleasant laugh to hear. "Perhaps I may. At present I prefer to remain in London. Why do you not go away? Is—she could not speak his name without hesitation—'is Lord Edgar so fond of town in the off season that he cannot tear himself away?"

Lela smiled and blushed. "No! I am afraid that he is staying because I like it! You see, it is all fresh to me, and I cannot help enjoying it. He is so kind and thoughtful."

"Ah!" breathed Edith, shading her eyes with her hand to hide the envious feeling that gleamed within them. "I cannot tell you how thoughtful! He seems to know every wish I have before I scarcely know it myself! They used to say most men were selfish; if it be so, he must be very, very different to most men! I wish that he would not give up so much for me! Sometimes, when I think of all that he has sacrificed, and all that he has risked by—by making me his wife, I feel that I have committed a great wrong to be so happy!"

Lela laughed and shook her head. "I am not! I am quite content. I only wish that we could always live in those dear little rooms at the Albany, and never be a great people."

"You are a strange girl," said Edith. "You always were a strange girl at school. And do you not mind what people think or say?"

"People think or say?" said Lela,



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"Man and wife are one, so if you talk of him, you talk of yourself, you know," said Edith, as if explaining.

A happy light came into Lela's eyes, and her head drooped, and she was silent.

Edith Drayton, looking from under her hand, felt a sharp pang of envy and malice. Then she asked herself the question: Was it possible that Lela could have no suspicion of this awful truth?

"How long are you going to keep your marriage secret?" she asked. Lela started, as if waking from a reverie.

"Only a little while longer. A few days, Edgar says. He is waiting for something to happen," she smiled. "I don't know what it is; but it is to make all the difference to us; it will make further concealment altogether unnecessary."

"He means the race," thought Edith, "and he has not told her of it," and a faint thrill of evil satisfaction ran through her at the thought that he should conceal something from this beautiful wife of his.

"And you have not minded being hidden away?" she asked. "Some girls, most girls, would have been anxious to have been acknowledged as Lady Fane, the wife of the heir of Farintosh; to have tasted all the glories of her position."

Lela laughed and shook her head. "I am not! I am quite content. I only wish that we could always live in those dear little rooms at the Albany, and never be a great people."

"You are a strange girl," said Edith. "You always were a strange girl at school. And do you not mind what people think or say?"

"People think or say?" said Lela,

her brows knitting. "I don't understand," and she did not.

Edith Drayton colored with a momentary shame; Lela's innocence was a shield against any arrows of that sort.

"I mean that—But it does not matter. And you are very happy?"

"Most perfectly," responded Lela. She laughed. "You remind me of Edgar! It is what he asks me so often."

"Ah!" with a spasm of jealousy. "Yes; to-day he asked me, as usual, the old, old question, and wanted to know whether I should be happier if I were like you—a great and fashionable lady—"

"He mentioned me?" said Edith, almost inaudibly.

Lela nodded, and turned round the bracelet which clasped Edith Drayton's wrist.

"Yes, he often talks about you. He says that he should have gone out of his mind—that's nonsense, of course!—that time he was searching for me, but for you. I think he looks upon you as a sort of sister—"

Edith Drayton sat up and pushed the mass of hair from her white brow with a resolute air.

"A sister!" she echoed, with hidden bitterness.

"Yes," said Lela, all unconscious of the storm that was raging in her hearer's bosom. "Yes, and he says that when we go to Hensworth—that is a place which belongs to him—he hopes that you will come and stay with us. You will, will you not?"

With a long-drawn sigh that was almost a sob, Edith Drayton rose and stretched out her white arms. She could not bear any more. All unconsciously and innocently Lela had been stabbing her to the heart; every word of the sweet, gentle voice had been like dagger thrusts, and she could bear no more.

"Come and stay with you!" she said with a low laugh. "Come—and—stay with you, and see for myself how happy you are! Thanks, thanks, very much! It is very kind! It is too kind! But, with a laugh of bitter sarcasm, only thinly veiled, "shouldn't I be in the way, don't you think?"

"No, no, no!" said Lela. "He would be delighted, and so should I! But ought you to get up, Edith, dear? I am afraid I have disturbed and excited you!"

"Then do not fear!" she retorted, gathering up her hair. "You have done me good! Look, don't I look much better?" and she swung round.

Lela looked at the beautiful face flushed, full of energy, and smiled.

"Don't you think so? I am, then! Your visit has done me more good than all the doctor's medicines, which I didn't take, by the way. Come and stay with you! Oh, yes, I shall be delighted! When you go to Hensworth!"

"Edgar will be so pleased," said Lela, simply. "Of course, Mr. Clifford Revel must come, too!" and she smiled.

Edith swung round again with a passionate fire in her eyes.

"And why Mr. Clifford Revel?" she demanded, almost fiercely.

"Because—oh, Edith, I am so sorry if I have angered you!—I thought, and so did Edgar, that—that—"

"Then think what you have thought no longer!" retorted Edith. Lela rose, pale and grave, and remorseful.

"Edith, I am very sorry. I did not mean to annoy you. It is just as if we were at school together! I was always saying something that made you angry."

"We are at school no longer," said Edith Drayton, drawn to her full height, and gleaming at the pure, sweet face darkly. "We are in the world, woman against woman! You have won, or think you have won"—she stopped short, brought to a standstill by the sudden pallor of astonishment and pain on Lela's face.

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"Yes," said Edith, shortly; then she looked down; "at least, I think I will take your advice, and go away for a time. You see, I am better," and she laughed constrainedly. "Good-by! Go and be happy—while you may," she added, as Lela closed the door after her.

A minute or two afterward Mrs. Drayton stole into the room, and started, for Edith was dressing with feverish haste.

"My dear child," she said, "what are you doing? Dr. Wilkes said that you were not to get up—"

"Dr. Wilkes and I disagree, mother, and when doctor and patient disagree, who shall decide?" retorted Edith, with a brusque laugh.

"But—" faltered the poor mother. "But me no buts, mother. I am better. Edith's herself again and eager for the fray! Look at me! Do I not look better? Mother, that was an excellent idea of yours, sending my old schoolfellow to see me! She has acted like a tonic! No more lying on the sofa for me!"

"My dear Edith!" "Don't expostulate. You are an excellent mother, but a poor logician. I am better! Can you not see that? There, I give you proof. You have been badgering me to go out of town; hitherto I have declined. I am ready to accede to your views now. We will go out of town. We will go—to some place near Badmore."

"Near Badmore?" repeated Mrs. Drayton, with a bewildered air.

"Yes. I want to be at the Badmore races, mother. I feel that they will complete the cure which that 'sweet young thing' has commenced. Send to the agents at once and take a small house near Badmore. Don't look at me as if I were mad."

"Sometimes I think you are," whined the poor woman. Edith laughed.

"Sometimes I, too, think I am; but I am clothed," touching the costly dress, "and in my right mind, now. Yes, mother, you and I will go to Badmore races, and see the end of the comedy!"

(To be Continued.)

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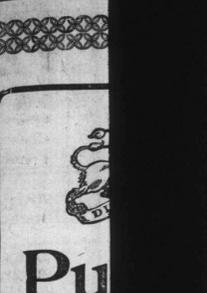
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