

Love in the Abbey OR Lady Ethel's Rival

CHAPTER XXXIII.
IN THE POSE OF DEFENDER.

Watching the speck of dust, he saw it grow into a cloud; then it was hidden by a clump of trees, and for the moment his face flushed passionately as he thought he had lost it for good and all; but presently there smote upon his ears the dim thud of a horse's hoofs smiting the dry grass, and a minute or so later he looked under his brows and saw a lady riding across the meadow and coming in a line with him.

For a moment his hand trembled so that he could scarcely throw the fly from him, for at a glance he had recognized her. Not a difficult thing to do, either, for there was no woman in the county who sat a horse as did madcap Kitty. Horse and rider seemed one as they came along, both their forms clearly cut against the red glow of the sky. They were like a heroic carving of a cameo.

As they came nearer he looked up again, and an emotion, difficult to analyze, stirred within him; for hidden by the turn of the bank, ringed as it was by alders, he could see her white she could not see him, and his searching eyes noticed the languid look of the little figure, the pensive turn of the graceful, sweetly smooth head. It was not thus he had seen her galloping across the downs that morning when she played the trick upon my Lord Sterne. It was not thus that any one would have pictured wild, willful Kitty. Suddenly she turned the corner, and he knew by the stiffening of the figure, by the haughty rising of the ivory head that she had seen him.

Then he turned, and, with an eagerness that was only too real—that he could not conceal or tone down, stood bareheaded before her.

A slight flush stained her face as she pulled up and looked down at him, then the color left her cheeks and a cynical smile took its place; and looking at her he saw, with a thud of the heart, that a week had done for madcap Kitty. Pale, with colorless lips, compressed as if by weariness of hours of hot battle and inward wrestling; with her deep, brilliant eyes flashing defiantly and yet miserably, with that hard look upon her white face so easily imagined, so impossible to describe; she was Kitty still—Kitty,

more lovely certainly in his eyes than she had ever been—but light-hearted, merry-voiced, glad, smiling Kitty no longer. The tomboy Kitty had gone—alas! perhaps forever, and here was Miss Catherine Trevelyan, lovely, haughty, strong-willed, unmerciful to herself, to all the world; in a word, a woman. And a woman of whom the Honorable Francis might be indeed proud; Heaven forgive him!

"Good evening," she says, in a low, clear voice, cold, sarcastic, as unlike the old, merry welcome as it well could be. "What sport?"

"None," he says hurriedly, as if the question was too trivial. "Are you well, quite well? I heard—"

"That I had been ill," she says, with an angry glitter. "You should know better than give a moment's credence to the wild gossip of this forsaken district. I have never been better in my life. I am quite well. You may always draw your conclusions from Beveridge's gossip on the contrary principle. Do you generally—hurry on and pointing her whip with a fine sarcasm at his fishing line—"do you generally fish for trout without a fly? There are, never many fish in this part of the Lombe—it is about the only spot which they do not swarm in, and if they were as thick as blackberries in Durley Wood they would not swallow simple catgut."

He glances at the rod indifferently, and turns to her with a gesture of earnest entreaty.

"It is true that my heart has not been in this idle foolery—"

"Trout fishing is not bad fun," she says dryly, keeping her eyes fixed on his earnest face with a defiantly curious gaze.

"My thoughts have been elsewhere, Miss Trevelyan, I dared to hope against hope—with a kind of despair—that you might come—that I might see you to-night!"

Kitty's white teeth touch her under lip with somewhat too sharp a pressure for a smile.

"I always ride in the evening, and generally in this direction."

"Yes," he says hurriedly, "I was not so mad as to dream that you would go out of your way to meet me."

"No, indeed," she says, with cold impressiveness.

"And therefore I waited here in the wild chance that you might pass. When I called at the Lawn this morning—"

"And found papa asleep and myself for once following his revered example. It is a good example, too," she adds bitterly, "one that I intend to profit by most religiously. We

sleep day and night at the Lawn, so if you should chance to call again, be kind enough to ring softly."

He looks up at her with sad protest against her raillery, and then sighs, and is silent.

"And you?" says Kitty. "I thought you were abroad."

He raises his head, and looks at her with a plaintive little smile.

"I intended going," he says; "but, you see, I am here!"

"So I see," she says coolly. "You remained for the delight of angling—without a fly—the miserable Lombe. Mr. Galthrop, you have my sympathy!"

His face flushes at her tone of mockery.

"I need it more than you know or can guess," he says. "Miss Trevelyan, it was not to fish in the Lombe that I decided to turn my back on Switzerland—"

"Switzerland?" she says. "You, too, were going to Switzerland?"

"Yes," he says, looking at her earnestly. "It is in the papers, I have no doubt, that I have really started."

"No, it is not," she says sharply, and he sees by the quiver that runs over her face, by the sudden flash of color and quickly succeeding pallor, that the pregnant paragraphs have done their work.

He inclines his head slightly.

"I was to have gone," he says; "but—well, I could not go. Miss Trevelyan, a man does not break with the associations, the ties of a life without a struggle. My life has been spent in aiding the ambition, in faithful vassalage to one man. Until—"

"Until," he pauses, and looks at her with a mournful significance, "I had no higher desire than to remain that devoted slave which the world believes me; but a power greater than any I have hitherto known, a power born within my heart, springing up within my being, has proved too strong for the dictating wisdom, the force of habit, the whisperings of common prudence. Miss Trevelyan—my friend, my chief and I have parted."

As he makes this announcement, sadly yet firmly, with a hidden significance, Kitty looks at him with dark, questioning eyes.

"Do you mean," she says presently, speaking as if with an effort, "that you and—Lord Sterne have quarrelled?"

He raises his brows.

"I fear," he says quietly, "that you have rightly described the separation."

"What about?" says Kitty abruptly, coldly, though her heart is beating with a wild, passionate despair.

"I cannot tell you," he says.

"That means," she says, with a hot, momentary flush; "that means that it was about me."

"It concerned," he says, looking up at her with suppressed passion in his voice and eyes, "it concerned the one being whom I respect, reverence, love, beyond all others on earth."

Kitty shrinks slightly from that quiet outburst, but she still keeps her eye on him.

"Miss Trevelyan—Kitty," he goes on, "a year, a month ago, a word of light gossip, the shallow sneer of a couple of empty-headed women, in a salon full of them, would have passed by me unnoticed, though it had concerned my best friend—such is the way of the world; but I could not endure that a slight, though so contemptible a one, should be cast upon her whom I adore, whom I worship! Yet I could have passed it by, I think, with silent scorn, had he not stood there, silent and shamefully acquiescent. He who should have been the first to avenge the whispered insult and spring to your defence—"

"My defence! Then," says Kitty, breathes rather, for she scarcely speaks, so light a grip seems to seize her heart, "then it was about me these ladies were speaking? About me, and he, Lord Sterne," the name drops between her clenched teeth, "stood by, you say—"

He smiles bitterly.

"You are surprised," he says; "you would not be if you knew him as I know him."

"He stood by," murmurs Kitty, with eyes fixed on the ground and a hectic flush upon either cheek, "and—"

And she raises her eyes defiantly.

"What is he capable of?" he says, in a low voice, hushed with indignation.

"Not of love; he knows nothing more of it than the name, and that he has

desecrated and crushed a score of times. The passing fancy he calls love is as sickle as the wind. Oh, Kitty! I must speak. Is that love which breaks its pledged word and solemn truth for a mere pretense—a jealousy grounded on a cause so slight? Or is it not rather the shallow, heartless impulse which seizes upon any pretext, however slight, to rid itself of a blessing, too, far too great for it to appreciate or understand?"

White and motionless she looks down at him.

"I—I understand," she murmurs, inaudibly. "I—I saw in the papers that—"

He looks down, as if to spare her.

"Cannot you speak?" she says, with a harsh laugh. "Why do you hesitate? Do you fear that you will—wound me. Ha! ha! do you think women cannot be as sickle as men—that we cannot have our fancies and tides of them as easily?" (Oh, Kitty! Kitty! what words are these?) "Is it true that my Cousin Lady Ethel is to be the future Lady Sterne?"

"It is true," he says firmly. "Why should I not say it, and why should you not hear it? Kitty, if I thought that such news could move you, I—much as I love you—you know I love you—I would go, and never look on your face again."

She looks at him with absent eyes—does not hear him.

"It is true," he says, "and here, as I stand, I would part with all I hold most worth having, to know that you do not care, and to let him know it, too!"

She looks at him and her eyes gleam.

"Yes," she murmurs, "that would be well. Yes, yes! he thinks," with a hard smile, "that I am alone here, weeping," she laughs a reckless, unmitigated laugh, "and fretting for—what has passed! If he knew how little I cared, happy—happy, I say!—how happy I am! Yes, I would like him to know that," and her hand clenches on her whip.

"Dear Kitty!" he says, bending closer to her. "My own Kitty! I knew you did not care. I knew that when they said you were jilted—that it served you right for trusting to him whom no woman believed—"

"They said that?" she asks, between her teeth.

"That you did not care, and that some day he would know it!"

"Yes," she says, passionately but quietly, with a deadly quiet; "he shall know it!"

"Yes," he says, as if echoing her determination. "Ah, Kitty, when I spoke up and gave them scorn for scorn, when I told them, with a smile, that it was he who had been jilted and not you—I had no right to speak in your defence—no right but that which my love for you gave me! Kitty, I have been waiting for you all day—waiting, hoping against hope, that I should see you; for, Kitty, I cannot keep silent any longer. I must speak; I must tell you how dearly I have loved you—aye, through it all and ask you to give me the right to show him that you are not the forlorn, deserted—"

He stops, warned by the flash of her eyes.

(To be Continued.)

Fashion Plates.

A PRETTY DRESS FOR PARTY OR BEST WEAR.



2624—In organdie, net, dotted swiss or batista, this model will be very attractive. It may be trimmed with lace or embroidery edging, or, the free edges of bolero and sleeve, and the tucks may be finished with hemstitching. If desired, the bolero may be omitted. Voile, gabardine, gingham, poplin and repp are nice, too, for this design. As illustrated, the neck edge may be high or low, and the sleeve in bishop, bell or puff style.

The Pattern is cut in 4 sizes: 6, 8, 10 and 12 years. Size 8 requires 3 1/2 yards of 27-inch material for the dress and 3/4 yard for the bolero. A pattern of this illustration mailed to any address on receipt of 10 cents in silver or stamps.

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