

AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ROMANCE

BY BEATRICE DILLON-LAWRENCE

NO, it's no use. You are courted and fêted; so are all the other girls. But I—the men smile on me, it's true, and their ardour is intense for a day or so. Then—pouf—away it goes like thistle-down. With you the love lasts—and I'm not monstrous ill-looking, am I?"

The speaker put her rounded elbows on the toilet-table and, resting her chin in her hands, gazed intently at her reflection in the mirror. The only other occupant of the room, a very beautiful girl of about eighteen, shrugged her shoulders and, tipping her chair back as far as it would safely go, said with a frown:

"You talk a great deal of nonsense, Sheelah Spenser. Of course, you're pretty, and you know it, but you're too timid, my love. Law, if I were to act like you—" The frown deepened and she bent towards her friend earnestly. "Sheelah, take this advice from a wiser, if not an older, head. When a man flirts, flirt back, but grudgingly, demurely; then purse your rosy lips right under his, but, hark to me, before he kisses them, fly—and he pursues. 'Twould be a prodigious fool that wouldn't. And then you have him. Ah, the dear silly things! how easily they are caught. There isn't a man in Bath that I cannot bring to my feet in one hour. Par example, Monsieur La Casse, the French woman-hater. Bah, woman-hater! My dear Sheelah, there aren't any; why, he proposed after only one week of my charming society."

"But you are engaged— Yes?"

"Of course, I'm engaged—not to Monsieur, thanks be to Heaven, but when I'm married I suppose it will be the same way. Now you're shocked."

"Oh, Constance, but Sir William is so nice and kind; how can you?"

"Dear little Faithful, don't think me dreadfully wicked. I'm not, for it's just a bad habit. I'd die if I couldn't flirt. I told Sir William that, but he will marry me, so it's his risk, not mine. I'm positive I'll be bored to death with him before the honeymoon is over, but, law, what can a girl do? I have to marry someone."

"I don't understand it, so many amuse themselves in this way."

"And nobody cares. There's our fair hostess, Lady Kitty. She flirted outrageously with Charlie O'Hara last evening. I vow I almost died laughing to see milord gazing reproachfully at them through his monocle and then raising his eyebrows fully two inches. Charlie is the same as myself, a flirt. But I don't think he'll ever marry, for he only exists to break silly little hearts. You start, child, are you one of them?"

Sheelah shook her head slowly, a deeper pink than usual stealing over her face and neck.

"No—o, he is my—a sort of relation, you know, so I couldn't be—I mean—well—you see, he—" she stopped in confusion and Constance laughed.