

One in a Thousand, BUT TRUE TO THE LAST

CHAPTER XIX. TWO MONTHS.

I know she is thinking of Col. Cardylion, and I hate her worse than ever. I feel, too, that I must be very wise, very careful, very circumspect.

I go upstairs to dress for dinner, with a heavy lead, and a dull pain at my heart, which makes me long to fling myself down and weep.

"I am afraid you're not well, my lady?" she says, when I enter the room. "You're very pale. Can I get anything for you?"

"No, thank you, Lane," I say. "I am a little tired, that is all."

"Let me put a little color on to-night, my lady?" she urges.

"Oh, I cannot wear colors!" I answer. "Lady Lasselles would be hurt, and, I dare say, dinner will set me all right again."

"I mean rouge, my lady," says Lane, quietly.

"Oh, dear, no!" I say, sharply. "Whatever made you think of it? I don't look so very bad—scanning myself eagerly in the glass."

"You are very white, my lady," she answers. "Lady Derwent always used it when she lost her color."

"I did not know she was delicate," I say. "She always looked so flushed."

"Oh, yes, my lady, so she was, in general! But she did not get on at all with my lord; indeed, they used to quarrel awfully; and then, if she was going out, or company was expected, I always had to put her a little color on, for she would be as white as—as you are now, my lady."

The girl breaks off, as if unable to find any simile more appropriate than to describe Lady Derwent's pallor than myself.

"Well, I haven't been quarrelling with Sir Adrian," I say, with a laugh, "so I don't mind if I am rather pale."

"Oh, no, my lady—I didn't mean anything of that sort! People might say it makes no difference, but it's much pleasanter for the servants when the master and mistress get on well. Lady Lasselles' maid was asking me this afternoon if you and Sir Adrian ever disagreed; but I told her, says I, 'Sir Adrian he just worships the ground my lady walks on!'"

I don't like that Green at all, my lady. She seems to me to be one of those prying women that are always attending to other people's business. When I came up this evening, I found her sitting here, and she'd no need to come in here at all. And once, when we were staying with my lady in town, I caught her prying about some notes that were lying on the mantel-shelf in your room. They were all addressed to Sir Adrian; but I used to put them all away in your dressing case after that."

"I didn't know," I say, stupidly, and wishing I had not spoken.

"Did you think"—putting his arm round me and laughing wickedly—"that I was making love to Theo?"

"Well, it looked very much like it," I admit.

"Did you ever see me making love?" he demands.

"Yes, of course," I answer, with extreme promptitude.

"Oh, you have! And to whom, may I ask?"

"Why, to me, of course!"

"Well, my child," he says, "if you were to live a thousand years, you would never see me making love to Theo as I do to you."

"Ah, if I only could believe that! But I do not.

Clark's Pork & Beans advertisement with image of a woman and product.

"I wondered what they were there for," I say. "They were only bills, and so on, and couldn't have had any interest for anyone. I think, Lane, when I am out, you had better put the key of this room in your pocket, because it is really very tiresome if you cannot be downstairs for an hour."

"Thank you, my lady. I should feel much safer," is her reply.

"I feel as if the bars of my prison were drawing closer and closer toward me. I am as helpless in Theo's clutches as a little sparrow in the claws of a cat. Yet I remember that not even a sparrow falleth to the ground unnoticed. Surely, right will conquer might in the end! Yet is it possible that Theo, a Luttrell born, can have descended so low as to set her maid to spy upon my actions and pry over my correspondence?"

I do not like to believe it, and yet what could she mean by asking if Adrian and I get on well?"

"And she asked me, my lady—Green did!—if Col. Cardylion didn't come here a great deal."

"When was that?"

"This afternoon, my lady."

"Oh, well, tell Green to be good enough to mind her own business!" I say; and then I open the door and go into Adrian's dressing room.

He has just arrived at the tie period, so I stand by meekly and wait until he has come to a satisfactory conclusion, when, still looking in the glass to see the full effect, he says:

"Well, my lady?"

"How did you manage to get off so early?" I ask, as carelessly as I can.

"Field day postponed, so I was able to finish all my work by three o'clock. I was rather astonished to find Theo in."

"Sore throat, I think," I say, by way of explanation.

"Oh, has she?" with an indifference which is, to tell myself, too studied to be real. "Here, child, fasten this flower in, will you?"

"Where did you get it?" I ask, taking up the delicate camellia carefully.

"Madam Theo presented it to me with a speech just like a complete letter writer," he answers, laughing.

Theo! I would give anything to crush the waxen petals and fling them away, but I do not follow inclination. I pin it most carefully into his buttonhole, and arrange the bit of maiden hair so as to show it to the utmost advantage, and then I tell him that it looks very nice.

"Good girl!" he says complacently. "I don't know anyone that can pin a flower into one's coat so well as you can."

"Not even Theo?" I suggest.

"Theo! Why she tried this afternoon, and pricked herself horribly—rah the pin right in under the thumb nail!"

"Oh, that was what you were so occupied with when we came in!" I exclaim.

"Exactly. What did you think we were after?"

Theo is already there, installed in a low chair close by the fire—my seat, in fact—with another in tempting nearness to it.

"Down, already?" says Adrian. "You are early!"

"I never spend much time in dressing," answers Theo. "I think it is such a waste."

"Ah, it must be in the family," says my husband, with a laugh; "for Audrey's always ready ages before I am!"

"Yes," I put in; "but then, I dress straightaway. I don't spoil fifteen ties 'before I'm satisfied!'"

"I don't know where your notions of honor are, Lady Charteris," laughs he; "but, in my young days, children who told tales out of school—otherwise sneaked—generally got sent to Coventry."

"Oh, you won't try that!" I answer. "But that reminds me, I shall be very much obliged, Theo, if you will tell your maid that our private affairs are no business of hers whatever, that it can be no concern of hers how Adrian and I get on, nor how often Col. Cardylion or any other gentleman comes to this house."

If I had not suspected Theo before, I should do so now, for she turns absolutely scarlet—a vivid, burning scarlet, which spreads itself over face and throat, and stains even her tiny, shell-like ears.

"I don't quite understand," she stammers.

"Don't you?" I say, icily. "I think it is very easy to do so. Lane has found your maid prying into Sir Adrian's letters, and during yesterday and to-day she has been asking all manner of inquisitive and impertinent questions about our mode of life, our visitors, and so on; and, very properly, too, Lane thought it her duty to tell me."

"Very well," says Theo. "I will speak to her."

Adrian, who has been looking from one to the other, in intense surprise, ejaculates:

"Why, whatever could she want to know anything about Cardylion for?"

"I can't say. Perhaps she has designs upon him herself," I answer, with a frosty laugh; "or, what is still more probable, she may fancy I have."

"I'm sure I hope you haven't," he says, laughing, though trying to look grave; "because, in that case, I shall have to break his head, and performing that operation for your superior officer is a serious matter in the army."

"Would it not be rather hard upon him?" says Theo.

"Very; because I am sure he would be drawn into it most unwillingly; but, then, don't you see, it would be the proper thing to do."

"You are a perfect fire eater," murmurs Theo, "a Berserker, a Viking!"

Even at the expense of our manners, Adrian and I cannot refrain from indulging in a hearty burst of laughter.

"Poor Audrey!" says he, in a tone of mock pity.

"Why?" says Theo, softly, raising her sweet, forget-me-not, blue eyes under their long, silky fringes, to his laughing, gray ones.

Mr. Wynne is announced at this moment, and, as I go forward to receive him, I hear the end of her sentence—"happy Audrey, I think."

"Thank you," is Adrian's reply.

"Let me introduce Mr. Wynne, Cured Eczema Like Magic."

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Theo gives him one look of her half-closed eyes, and then begins playing with her fan.

"If you had been a moment sooner," says Adrian, "you would have heard Lady Lasselles calling me names."

"Oh, Adrian!" exclaims Theo, deprecatingly.

"Really?" says Mr. Wynne, looking at Theo for the first time, as if he expected she might suddenly jump up and box his ears.

"Fact!" continues Adrian. "She called me a fire eater, and a Berserker."

"A Berserker?" interrupts Mr. Wynne. "What is that?"

"A Berserker," says Adrian, in his turn. "Oh, it is—a what is it, Theo?"

"It is a— begins Theo, glibly enough; "oh, well, it is a—"

"I'll tell you what it is, Theo," says Adrian, gravely. "It is very dangerous—work using personal terms of the meaning of which you are not perfectly certain. Audrey, what is a Berserker?"

"One of those piratical Norse vikings we hear so much of about the time of the Conquest," I answer.

"Oh, so you have married a piratical villain!" he says, comically. "What a prospect for you!"

"There's many a true word spoken in a jest," I say, perhaps a little bitterly, for Mr. Wynne looks at me in undisguised amazement. "And here are Loys and Teddy."

"I thought you had Stewart Dare staying here!" says Loys, looking round the room.

(To be Continued.)

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