

One in a Thousand, BUT TRUE TO THE LAST

CHAPTER III.
LORD LASSELLES.

At my anecdote my future brother-in-law goes off into such a genuine burst of laughter that I am compelled to join him.

"Pon my soul," he says, while the tears stand in his eyes, "you really are one of the jolliest little mortals I ever met with! Come round to the stables."

I decline his offer, though I have found him improve on acquaintance. I can see my father and Loys already making for that haven of masculine delight; but I return to the house, and just enter the drawing room in time to hear Theo sobbing passionately.

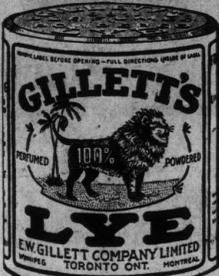
"Oh, dear hand that he kissed—dear ring that he gave me—oh, tell me once again that he loved me as I"—with a long, shuddering sigh—"as I love him still!"

During the ten days which follow everything at Thorngaby Manor is in too great a state of bustle and excitement for any regrets or anything approaching to drawing back. Theo is too fully occupied in choosing silks and jewels, with interviews with milliners and dressmakers, with upholsterers and servants, to attend to anything I may wish to say. Several times, when I happen to find myself alone with Lord Lasselles, my heart prompts me to cry out that Theo does not love him, and that she does love another; yet what Loys said about Arthur St. Clair turning out to be a pawnbroker keeps me silent, and the days slip by, until it is too late.

Presents pour in from all the countryside, and three days before the wedding Maud and Constance Luttrell, of Rest, arrive. They are bright, stylish girls, fair-haired, like all the Luttrells. They think that Theo is an awfully lucky girl, and that Lord Lasselles is awfully nice; and they do not, either of them, hesitate an instant to say that they would give anything to be in Theo's shoes. Late in the evening, when he comes in for a cup of tea—which, he demands, shall be strong and have plenty of sugar—he brings four little boxes, which he distributes among the bridesmaids. They contain each a locket of plain gold, with "Theo" written across a shield of turquoises. "Oh, how awfully nice!" cry Maud and Constance, in the same breath. "And they will match our dresses exactly."

"It is very kind of you, Lasselles," says Theo, softly, yet without any love in her voice. "You don't ask me what I have for you?" he says, sitting down upon the arm of her chair. "As you've given me about twenty

GILLETTS LYE EATS DIRT



presents already to-day, I think that would sound rather greedy."

"Well, but I've brought you something I want you to wear on Thursday and every day."

As he spoke, he opens a case, and shows her a locket exactly like ours, save that the shield whereon her name is graven is diamonds.

"It is very beautiful," says Theo, taking it into her hand; yet even then I see the glitter of those other diamonds which adorn her right hand, and I shiver.

"Let me put it on for you," says the bridegroom.

So he unclasps the necklet she wears, and, with bungling, yet certainly loving, fingers, fastens the shining ornaments about her throat. "Thank you, Lasselles," says Theo, gently, and lays her hand for an instant upon his own. He looks intensely pleased, and, in spite of his ugliness and his unvarnished manners, I feel, somehow, as if Theo is not acting quite honestly by him, for, even if he knows she does not care for him, he hopes to win her some day. He would not, I think, wish to marry her if he knew that her whole heart is given to another. But Derrick, Lord Lasselles, does not know it, and so the gay preparations continue without impediment.

CHAPTER IV. THE WEDDING.

When the bridegroom's sisters come, I decide at once that they are nice; their mother is nicer. She seems to have only one failing. She cannot see how things are between the bride and bridegroom. She is, mother-like, blind to his personal plainness, and desirous that he should have his own way. She evidently never dreams for a moment that Theo is not marrying for love, but that a title and a large income, or what is infinitely worse, a feeling of pique, have, or has, made her bestow her hand where her heart is not.

"I admire Theo immensely," she says, on the afternoon previous to the wedding, when our cousins, with Loys and I, are sitting round the drawing-room table, busily directing cards and writing out the menus for the breakfast. "She has such calm repose of manner, such a grace when entering a room; she is such a perfect aristocrat, I tell Edith and Constance that they may, with advantage, take her for a model. She is perfectly charming."

"I am glad you like her," says Loys; "because it would be very wretched for Theo if you did not." "It would be impossible to help loving Theo," says Lady Lasselles, graciously.

"Everyone says so," puts in Constance Luttrell, warmly. I think of Arthur St. Clair, and wish that this was all over.

My wish, fulfilled itself quickly enough; the afternoon wears away, and the dinner is eaten. We do not have any guests who are not staying in the house, for there is to be a ball to-morrow evening. We get up a dance among ourselves, but it is a lame sort of affair, for three of our groomsmen, including the "best man," will not arrive until near midnight, so I have to dance with Maud, who finds it such tiresome work that she takes only one turn round the room. I am not sorry, for I am not so tall as my cousin, and she will not act as

gentleman, for fear, I imagine, of

spoiling her step for to-morrow night. Theo does not dance at all, but I dance once with Lord Lasselles, who is not an adept in the art. He seems to think that a rush and a jerk constitute waltzing, and, having knocked a couple down and overturned a side table laden with china, he stops declaring that he has not had such a good hop for many a day.

"I should hope not," I say, with a laugh, as I glance over to where Edith Lasselles, with a woe-begone countenance, is holding out a torn dress, and her parter is rubbing his shin. "Do you usually exert yourself so vigorously?"

"Oh, Edith always was the most luffay girl in existence!" he says, laughing carelessly. "And, as for Kerr, he's just the biggest duffer I know!"

"Poor things!" I remark. "They should have kept out of the way," he says, with calm indifference, and marches off to Theo's side. I do not know, of course, what she says to him, but while I am pinning up Edith's dress, he crosses the room, and says he is really very sorry, and will give her a new dress, if she will remind him.

"I hope I haven't smashed your shin, Kerr," he laughs; "for I can't very well buy you another, can I?"

Then, having made the amende honorable, he once more takes refuge by Theo's sofa. She smiles, and whispers something into his ear, at which he flushes up all over his face, but he looks pleased, so I conclude she has been kind to him. Poor Derrick! Much as I hated him at first, my heart is warming to him fast now, it seems to me a cruel thing to let him go blindly to the altar to-morrow, to meet the woman he loves but who loves not him. In my simple, childish honesty, I feel as though we are all conspiring against him by allowing this miserable farce to continue. I do not know that, if he were told all now, he would, in all probability, still wish to have Theo as his wife. When I say good-night to him, he tells me he shall not see me in the morning until we are in church. A sudden impulse prompts me to lift my face to his, and whisper that I hope he will be happy. "Thanks, little sister," he says, cheerily. "I dare say we shall, for I shall let Theo take the lead."

His good-natured, simple, homely way of expressing himself brings the tears into my eyes, and I hurry away and jump into bed before Loys comes upstairs.

I fall asleep with a wild wish at my heart that Derrick had waited a year or two, and had fallen in love with me—not because I envy Theo, or that I have an idea of being in love with him, but because there would be no Arthur St. Clair to make everything unhappy and miserable.

I awake in the morning to find Loys yawning and decidedly cross, already making her toilet—not the grand costume in which we are to make a tall for Theo, but in a plain wrapper, such as we were accustomed to wear in the morning at Mrs. Dickenson's.

"Come, do get up, Audrey," she says, sharply; "it's ever so late, and we've got to help Theo to dress."

"Why, what's that grand maid of her's for?" I ask, unwilling to move.

"To wait on her, of course."

"Well, then, why need we bother ourselves? We shan't do it half so well."

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"It is the proper thing to do," says Loys, decidedly; "so get up, you lazy creature, do."

She pulls all the clothes from off me relentlessly, and I lie shivering and shaking, although the warm, July sun is blazing straight into the room.

At last, in consequence of Loys' repeated admonitions, I rise, and make my toilet as quickly as she has done. We go down to the breakfast room, where we find all the bridesmaids assembled, chattering like so many magpies. Loys pours out the coffee; and presently the door opens, and Derrick's "best man" puts in his head.

"Miss Loys," he says, humbly, "it's awfully slow in the dining room; mayn't we come in here?"

"Who are 'we'?" asks Loys, saucily. "Oh, Kerr and the other groomsmen! It's not fair that we shouldn't grub with the bridesmaids this morning."

"Well, come in, then," laughs Loys; "but, mind, if anything is said, that you take the blame upon yourselves."

"Oh, yes!" is the reply.

Mr. Alan Fitzhugh comes in hastily followed by Mr. Kerr, Capt. Clark and Teddy Vincent. I see by Rose and Edith Lasselles' faces that they approve of the invasion. So do I, for it prevents Loys and me from breaking down and having red eyes to take to church with us.

Before the others have finished, I slip away, and go up to Theo's room. I find her sitting at the open window, her arms upon the sill, and her soft, gray eyes gazing listlessly into vacancy.

"Theo!" I say, timidly; for, somehow, of late I am afraid of my pretty sister, and I am not sure that she waits me here.

But she looks round, without either impatience or annoyance on her face, and holds out her hand to me.

"Well, Audrey, what is the matter?" she says, kindly. "Where is Loys?"

"Not finished her breakfast yet," I answer. "All the groomsmen have managed to get let in, so they are having great fun."

"Is it not time for you to be dressing, dear?" says she, after a long silence.

How strange it is that I feel so constrained and awkward when I am alone with Theo! There are only two years between our ages, and we used to be so much more to each other than sisters often are. Yet now, after a few months absence, she seems to have grown years and years in advance of me. I came upstairs for a last serious talk with her, but her kind, yet condescending manner checks my intention in the bud, and I go away, having kissed her, feeling miserable and longing to cry. But my tears are doomed not to flow yet a while, for in the corridor I meet all the girls coming gaily upstairs to begin the important business of dressing.

(To be continued.)

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