

(Continued from page 60)

LILIAN, THE HEIRESS.

"And what will that be?" "You know very well. I shall just say to her: 'Auntie, your son, Sir Guy, behaved so rudely to me this afternoon, I was obliged to leave Chetwood for a while. Then she will forgive me.'"

Sir Guy laughs in spite of himself; and Lilian, who has only peeped into the deep recesses of the plaid, might also be plainly seen with her lips apart and all her naughty bewitching face dimpling with laughter.

These frivolous symptoms are, however, rapidly and sternly suppressed on both sides. "I really cannot see what awful crime I have committed to make you so tactless," she says, presently, with a view to discussing the subject. "I merely went for a drive with my cousin as he should pass Stenmore on his way to the station."

"Perhaps that was just what made my misery," softly.

"What! my going for a short drive with Archie? Really, Sir Guy, you will soon be taken as a model of propriety. Poor old Archie! I am afraid I shan't be able to make you miserable in that way again for a very long time. How I wish those tiresome lawyers would let him alone!"

"Ask them to surrender him," says Guy, irritably.

"I would—cheerfully—if I thought it would do the least good. But I know they are all made of adamant."

"Lilian"—suddenly, unexpectedly—"is there anything between you and your cousin?"

"What?" with wide, innocent, suspiciously innocent eyes. "Tolly?"

"No," impatiently; "of course I mean Chetney," looking at her with a devious interest.

"Yes"—discomfited, with a desire for revenge—"more miles than I care to count."

"I feel"—steadily—"it is a gross rudeness my asking, and I know you need not answer me unless you like; but with a quick reply, I try to answer my question. Has anything passed between you and Chetney?"

"Not much," mildly; "one thrilling love-letter, and that's all."

"He never asked you to marry him?" with renewed hope.

"Oh, by the bye, I quite forgot that," indifferently. "Yes, he did ask me so much."

"And you refused him?" asks Guy, eagerly, intensely, growing white and cold beneath the moon's pitiless rays, that seem to take a heartless pleasure in lighting up his agitated face at this moment. But Lilian's eyes are turned away from him; so this degradation is spared him.

"No—no, not exactly," replies she. "You accepted him?" with drying lips and growing despair.

"No, not exactly," again returns Miss Chetney, with affected hesitation. "Then what did you do?" passionately, his impatient fear getting the better of his temper.

"I don't feel myself at liberty to tell you," retorts Lilian, with a provoking assumption of dignity.

Sir Guy looks as though he meant to give her a good shake, though indeed it is quite a question whether he has even the spirit for so much. He releases into silence, and makes no further attempt at conversation.

"However," says Lilian, to whom silence is always welcome, "I don't mind telling you what I shall do if he asks me again."

"What?" almost indifferently.

"I shall accept him."

"You will do very wisely," in a clear, though constrained voice that doesn't altogether impose upon Lilian, but, nevertheless, disagrees with her. "He is very rich, very handsome, and a very good fellow all round."

"I don't much care about good fellows, perversely; they are generally deadly slow; I am almost sure I prefer the other sort. I am afraid mine is not a well-regulated mind, as I confess I always feel more kindly disposed towards a man when I hear something bad of him."

"Perhaps if I told you something bad about myself, it might make you feel more kindly disposed towards me," with a slight smile.

"I suppose so," in a rather changed and far softer tone: "Yes. What claim have I on Chetwood?"

"But your tone implied that if even you had a claim it would be distasteful to you."

"Did it?"

"Does it?"

"Well, perhaps I didn't mean quite that. Did you mean all you said this morning?"

"Not all, I suppose."

"How much of it, then?"

"Unless I were to go through the whole of our conversation again, I could not tell you that, and I have no wish to do so; to be pained—in a low voice—'as I have been, once in a day is sufficient.'"

"Don't imagine I feel the least sorrow for you," says Lilian, making a wild attempt at recovering her ill humor, which has melted and vanished away.

"I don't imagine it. How could I? One can scarcely feel sorrow or pity for a person one openly professes to hate and despise," markedly, while searching her face anxiously with his eyes.

Miss Chetney pauses. A short but sharp battle takes place within her breast. Then she raises her face and meets his eyes, while a faint, sweet smile grows within her own; impelled half by a feeling of coquetry, half by a desire to please, she lets her fingers be still imprisoned close with the faintest pressure upon his.

"Perhaps," she whispers, leaning a little towards him, and raising her lips very close to his cheek, as though afraid of being heard by the intrusive wind, "perhaps I did not quite mean that, either."

Then, seeing how his whole expression changes and brightens, she half regrets her tender speech, and says instantly, in her most unselfish fashion:

"Pray, Sir Guy, are you going to make your horse walk all the way home?"

"You do not pity the sorrow of a poor little ward? I am absolutely frozen: do stir him up, Sir Guy, or I shall get out and run. Surely, it is too late in the year for nocturnal rambles."

"If my life depended upon it, I don't believe I could make him go a bit faster," returns he, telling his lie unblushingly.

"I forgot you were disabled," says Miss Chetney, demurely, letting her long lashes droop until they partially (but only partially) conceal her eyes from her guardian. "How remote I am! When one has only got the use of one hand, one can do so little; perhaps"—preparing to withdraw her fingers slowly, lingering from his—"if I were to restore you both yours, you might be able to persuade that horse to take us home before morning."

"I beg you will give yourself no trouble on my account," says Guy, hastily: "I don't want anything restored. And if you are really anxious to get home, with a pleasant and grateful smile—"I feel sure I shall be able to manage this slow brute single-handed."

So saying, he touches up the old animal in question rather sharply, which so astounds the willing creature that he takes to his heels, and never draws breath until he pulls up before the hall door at Chetwood.

"Parkins, get us some supper in the library," says Sir Guy, addressing the ancient butler as he enters: "the drive has given Miss Chetney and me an appetite."

"Yes," Sir Guy, directly, says Parkins, and, going down stairs to the other servants, gives it as his opinion that Sir Guy and Miss Chetney are going to make a match of it. For when two couples, says Mr. Parkins, who is at all times rather dim about the exact meaning of his sentences, "when two couples take to eating tea-and-supper, it is all up with 'em."

Whereupon Cook says, "Lor!" which is her usual expletive and means anything and everything; and Jane, the upper housemaid, who has a weakness for old Parkins's sayings, tells him with a flattering smile that he is "absolutely knowin'."

Meantime, Sir Guy, having ascertained that Miss Beauchamp has gone to her room, and that his mother is better, and asleep, he and Lilian repair to the library, where a cozy supper is awaiting them, and a cheerful fire burning.

Now that they are again in-doors, out of the friendly darkness, with the full light of several lamps upon them, a second edition of their early restraint—milder, perhaps, but still oppressive—most unaccountably falls between them.

Silently, and very gently, but somewhat distantly, he unfolds the plaid from round her slight figure, and, drawing a chair for her to the table, seats himself at a decided distance. Then he asks her with exemplary politeness what she will have, and she answers him then he helps her, and then he helps himself, and then they both wonder secretly what the other is going to say next.

But Lilian, who is fighting with a wild desire for laughter, and who is in her sweet mood, through having been compelled, by pride, to suppress all her usual good spirits, decides on making a dual effort at breaking down the barrier between them.

Raising the glass of wine beside her, she touches it lightly with her lips, and says, gayly:—"Come, fill, and pledge me, Sir Guy. But stay: first let me give you a little question that I hope will fall as a drop of nectar into your cup and chase that nasty little frown from your brow. Have I your leave to speak?" with a suspicion of coquetry in her manner.

[To be continued.]

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