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A LOVER AT LARGE.

BY SESSIE CHANDLER.

"But Kittie, you are perfectly unreasonable."

"Not at all, I know what I saw with my own eyes."

"Well, what did you see, then?"

"You sat by her all through a waltz, you talked to her and—looked at her, and then you got up and danced with her, a horrid dancer, too, that nobody thinks of dancing nowadays! And then you went out and put her in her carriage, and tucked her in. I saw it all."

"But Kittie—"

"You needn't say 'Kittie' to me! The idea of that little widow's being attractive! She's old enough to be your mother."

"No, she's not. We were born the same year, and I'm six months the oldest."

"Oh, you found that out, did you? Well, I wouldn't believe her. She's a sly, deceitful thing! She's had one lover—at least I suppose her husband loved her. I don't see why, though! I should think she'd be contented now to stay at home and behave herself, instead of trying to rob other women!"

He looked at her helplessly—the big, handsome, simple-minded fellow. He was no match for Kittie. She buzzed all around him, like a tormenting insect, too small to catch, too aggravating to be ignored.

"Kittie, you shall hear me," he exclaimed. "What were you doing when I sat beside Mrs. Millicent? Waltzing with Capt. Graham. Now I can't waltz till that confounded knee gets right again, and do you think it's such a pleasure to watch you circling round me—with other men?"

Mrs. Millicent talked with me, which is more than half the girls do, with a man who doesn't dance. Then came the lancers. I can get through those. I looked for you—but as usual, you were off with somebody else, so I danced with Mrs. Millicent. Surely it's no crime for me to dance one square dance with another woman, when you dance a dozen round dances with other men."

Miss Kittie Nicholson was unappreciated.

"It isn't so much that you did it," she said haughtily, "as that you enjoyed it so!"

He looked at her in amazement.

"Would you prefer to see me weep, as I dance? I'll remember that next time, and drop a few tears as I go."

"Oh, it isn't that. I can't make you understand. I'm not jealous, not at all. Still, everyone says you are a great flirt, and it seems so queer that you should be loving me, as you say you do, and yet so perfectly contented with another woman, at the same time."

"But I don't see anything of you, Kittie. You won't let our engagement be announced. I have to stand with the rest of the mob and take my chances. I can hardly ever see you alone. I'm perfectly happy when I'm with you—you know I am—but you won't let me be with you. You turn me off, and laugh at me, and starve me. Then I pick up what crumbs I can from other people's tables. I presume now, you're going out to-night."

Miss Nicholson colored and looked confused—"Well, yes, to tell you the truth I am. But not right away. Maud has a little supper to-night."

He looked at her savagely. "That's always the way! I shall go and see Mrs. Millicent."

"If you do, Gerald Hayes, I'll never speak to you again! The idea! Why Gerald, I believe you really like her."

Her tone had changed entirely, and a strain of real anxiety showed itself above the assumed petulance with which she had been teasing her lover.

"I do like her—what do you want me to do. Mrs. Miller hasn't invited me. It's too early to go to bed yet. Shall I go up and sit on the steps until you come out? I'm rather big to play lamb to your Mary, but I will if you wish it."

"Dear Gerald," said the girl, slipping her hand in his, "just wait a little longer. You've been so good and patient, I will tell everybody in a few days. It frightens me a little—that's all. But you know I love you, Gerald."

The last words were very low, but he heard them, and his arm was around her in a second, and he felt that he was being more than paid for all that he had suffered.

He left her half an hour later, with a much lighter heart. She was an unreasonable, spoilt beauty, he said to himself, but the dearest darling in the world.

He went up the street, whistling softly as he went.

Where should he go? It was, as he had said, too early to go to bed, and of course, he would not go to Mrs. Millicent's now. In fact he no longer wanted to. He was full of the afterglow of his last moments with Kittie.

Suddenly he bethought him of a friend of his mother, a charming, middle-aged woman, who lived right on the way. He owed her a dinner party call, too, and this was just the night to make it. So he walked along until he came to her door, keeping up his low, happy whistle.

But "who can contend with his lords?" Gerald Hayes, trying his best to do his duty, walked straight into the trap, which fate had set for his unwary feet. For, as he stood in Mrs. Norwood's hall, he heard music—a woman's voice singing. He stopped a moment listening, but the servant pulled the portiere and announced him, and there was nothing for him to do but enter the drawing-room. The lights were dim, but he saw Mrs. Norwood, sitting in her accustomed corner, and went at once to speak to her. The music stopped, and the figure at the piano rose hastily. He looked across to find that it was Mrs. Millicent.

"Don't get up, Annie," said Mrs. Norwood. "I'm sure Gerald will enjoy hearing you as much as I do. Gerald, have you ever heard Mrs. Millicent sing?"

"Never, I am so glad to have that pleasure."

"Well, sit right down and begin again, Annie. That was a lovely thing, that last."

Gerald Hayes moved nearer the piano. Mrs. Millicent looked at him and smiled. "You are quite sure this isn't going to be a nuisance?"

"What an idea! I shall love it, I know."

She began to look at her music, turning it over and selecting it, while he looked at her.

She was a small woman, less brilliantly pretty than Kittie. Her yellow hair waved away from her face, and over her head, and was gathered in a low knot. Her eyebrows were extremely level, and quite dark, much darker than her hair. It was this peculiarity which gave her face its character, for her cheeks were pale, and her mouth, although sweet, was very small. She wore a white dress, made very simply, it seemed to Gerald.

and yet there was something about it that appealed to him as essentially womanly.

Why is it there are certain faces, certain bits of jewelry, certain fabrics and colors, that we instinctively associate with a gentle woman? Other things may be just as delicate and pretty, but they lack the subtle fragrance of long association. We are not quite sure of them.

Gerald Hayes's eyes looked approvingly at Mrs. Millicent. Here was a restful woman—one, who, whatever else she might do, would never torment a man.

Then she began to sing. She had a sweet voice, carefully trained, and she sang with great feeling. She sang a number of love songs, and Gerald's heart thumped wildly through them all. He knew it was only singing, only the art of rendering a given emotion, and yet he felt that he would like once to hear a woman tell him that she loved him, in such sweet, low tones as that, so full of passionate feeling. Kittie had never done so; she had either announced the fact flippantly or allowed it to be reluctantly dragged from her.

He cared nothing at present for Mrs. Millicent, but within half an hour he was deeply in love with her voice. Whenever she stopped Mrs. Norwood would cry out, "Oh, do go on! I am enjoying it so!"

Her eyes were closed, and she had every appearance of nodding in her corner, but she roused herself each time, with the stopping of the music.

Finally, when Mrs. Millicent was nearly too tired to sing any more, Mrs. Norwood rang and gave some orders, and then they settled themselves in one of the cosy corners and chatted away like very old friends.

Mrs. Millicent's maid came for her, but Mrs. Norwood said: "Send her away. Don't make her wait. It's too early to go yet, and here is Gerald Hayes, with nothing in the world to do, but see you home."

Mrs. Millicent hesitated. "Oh, do let me," Gerald hastened to say, "it will be the greatest pleasure," and so after some demurring, the maid was dismissed, and the three sat down to a delicious little supper. Everything at Mrs. Norwood's was good, and she herself seemed to be fully awake at last, and most amusing. She rattled on, tell one naively funny story after another, and Gerald found that he and Mrs. Millicent were glancing at each other with a perfect understanding of their hostess. That is always delightful sympathy, when two people think the same of a third, and know they do, without expressing it.

It was late—later than any of them imagined, when Gerald found himself walking home with Mrs. Millicent. The spell of the evening was broken now. He was simply a tired man, escorting a silent little woman home.

Therefore he had no feeling of guiltiness, when he suddenly met Kittie. Yes, Kittie, in a carriage stopping before a house where she had evidently left one of her party. The searching electric light fell full upon her face, but there was no time to speak. The carriage drove off, and he and Mrs. Millicent walked on. He was not uncomfortable about it till after he got home. Then he began to think how Kittie would demand explanations, and how impossible it would be to satisfy her. He resolved that he would see her the first thing in the morning, explain it all, and get through the little scene as soon as possible.

But Kittie was not in when he called in the morning, nor was he more successful when he tried to see her in the afternoon. The first rebuff irritated him, the second antagonized.

Gerald Hayes was a sweet-natured man, easily led, and quickly influenced, but obstinate if one tried to drive him. His heart hardened against Kittie for her absurd misunderstanding, and her silly idea of punishing him.

He resolved to ask Mrs. Millicent to drive with him that evening. She went, and he had the pleasure of passing Kittie in his whitechapel as she was driving with her mother. She didn't see him, but sat unnecessarily straight, and was so elaborately conscious that Mrs. Millicent exclaimed: "What is the matter? Don't you know Miss Nicholson?"

"Not to-night, it seems," he answered grimly.

She looked at him keenly, but said nothing more.

"This has been a delightful drive," said he, when he helped her out, "won't you go again with me? Would to-morrow be too soon?"

She looked at him and laughed. He was so big and yet so boyish. The frown that had wrinkled his forehead when they passed Kittie still shadowed his handsome face, and this little trick of using her for a foil was such an old one, and so transparent.

"Not to-morrow," she answered gently, "but sometime, certainly."

"I wish you would go to-morrow," he said earnestly, his face dark with trouble, "I really wish it very much."

He was forming the desperate design of driving with her every evening, and passing Kittie every time.

"Not to-morrow," she repeated, and left him disconsolate. On the morrow he had other things to think of, for Kittie wrote to him at last.

It was a very angry, short letter.

"After your outrageous conduct," she began, "you can hardly expect me to see you again. Our engagement, which most fortunately has never been announced, is

now ended. I have no ring to return, but I send with this whatever things I have that might remind me of you. Do not try to see me, for it is useless.

"With many regrets over my own foolishness, believe me,

"Truly yours,

"Katherine Nicholson."

To this he answered:—

"My dear Kittie—I came to see you on Monday, with a full explanation of my 'outrageous conduct,' but you evidently did not care to hear it. I have done nothing which I can look upon in any way, as a reason for breaking our engagement. I am therefore compelled to believe that you wish it broken. Against your wish I will not appeal.

"Believe me,

"Very sincerely yours,

"Gerald Hayes."

After sending this note he felt very miserable, so miserable, in fact, that it did not seem to him he could exist without consolation, so he went to see Mrs. Millicent. He made so many cynical remarks to her, in the course of his visit, about the faithlessness of women, that she had a very good idea of what had happened, and was intensely amused. She sang to him and he seemed to quite enjoy all the melancholy ballads, revealing especially in one, with the pleasing refrain, "When love is a lie, and Hope is dead."

"You're feeling down to-night, aren't you?" she asked, after she had finished singing.

"Yes," he answered, biting the ends of his moustache, and glaring savagely. "I've had rather a blow to-day."

He would have told her all, in a minute, but she would have liked him less, if he had, and so she headed him off.

"Do you ever read Browning?" she was going to say, but the absurdity of the question struck her, and she changed it to:—

"There is a little verse I love. It goes:—

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which

The first was made.

Our times are in His hand

Who saith "A whole I planned,"

Youth shows but half;

Trust God all, nor be afraid."

"I think that fits your case. 'The best is yet to be.' You've only seen half—hardly that. See it all, before you decide it's so worthless."

"Do you really think one can get over one's troubles and forget them, and—and be happy without the things that one wants?"

"I think you can," she said, smilingly. "I know you can. It isn't the time now to write, and so they lived happy ever afterward," at the end of your story. It would make the story too short, too stupid. But it will be written there yet, never fear."

"I think I shall go away," he said, gloomily. "I'm feeling rather seedy, and a little change does a fellow such a lot of good."

"Oh, don't go now," she answered, "I'm expecting Miss Sherlock, from Virginia, and her cousin, to stay a month with me. I've rather depended on you to help me entertain them. They're nice girls, both of them. I think you'll like them."

(To be Continued)

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(To be Continued)

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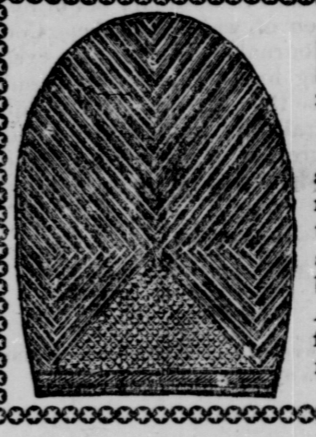
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