

SCORN FOR SCORN.

A CONTINUED STORY.

"But she is eighteen," said Helen, in a bright tone that woke me as effectually as a douche of cold water would have done, "and not a child at all; and in her position there is nothing so desirable as an early marriage. Of course she feels that herself; and being inexperienced in the ways of the world, she misunderstands your kindness, and imagines that you are in love with her, and mean to marry her. You are not a great party, Kendrick, in your own world, but you would be a splendid catch for a girl in Violet's position. You can't wonder that she puts on all her little airs to catch you—she is so full of ambition, poor child! She devours all I tell her of society and all the fashionable news in the papers, and talks to Hudgell about being a great lady and going to court. You must show her some discourtesy, Kendrick, to cure her."

"It is absurd, Helen!" he answered impatiently. "As if I could ever be suspected of wanting to marry a little child out of the nursery! I am sure you are mistaken. At any rate, I shall be gone to-morrow, and there will be no more room for mistake on either side."

Then I heard them go through the drawing room to the music room; and presently Helen began to play the accompaniment to a duet they often sang together. I sat still—immovable, speechless—my head and my heart feeling as though they would burst; I was filled with anger and a passionate longing to prove to them how utterly mistaken they were—she in her ill nature, and he in his miserable conceit. How I longed to be avenged upon them for the insult of their suspicions! Misunderstand him indeed! An early marriage desirable in my position? Imagine he was in love with me! Inexperienced in the ways of the world! A splendid catch for a girl of my position! And I must be cured, like Elaine, by some discourtesy.

Oh, what could I do—what I could do! It would be useless to tell them that I would not marry Kendrick Tredennick—not if he went down upon his knees and crawled round the room after me, as I had read of lovers doing; they would not believe me. Naturally they would think I said it because the grapes were sour—because he had refused me. Oh, if I could all at once be endowed with the power of some of those women of whom I had read—sirens like Mary Stuart—with whom every man fell madly in love, and who turned upon them and slew them all with a scornful smile! Oh, if some fairy or angel or friend—I did not care which—would give me for one day the gift of surpassing magical loveliness, and that other more wondrous, more mysterious, more potent charm that women have who have not beauty, and yet slay their thousands while beauty slays hundreds, and rule the hearts of all men! Oh, if he would fall wildly, helplessly in love with me, and throw himself at my feet, so that I might have the joy of quivering him! He would never believe that I would not marry him unless he were really to ask me and I were to refuse him.

But how was I to refuse a man who had not asked me? And there was not the slightest chance of winning his love and spurning it before they all left by the forenoon train on the morrow. And he would go back to London congratulating himself and me on the fact of his having removed his dangerous and too fascinating presence from the neighborhood of my too inflammable heart. If he did not actually forget me, he would only sometimes remember, with an indignant complacent smile, his poor country cousin, the ignorant child who had mistaken his confiding jaunting carriage for love, and was dying alone in the country for loss of him.

If I only had a trusted friend who would write him a letter that would be like gall and wormwood to his pride, a line open at his self-debating vanity, that would hit at the conceit in which a certain lady held him, and at the great admiration in which she was held by all who knew her, and say how she might marry whom she pleased, and meant to marry very magnificently indeed, having such an untimely choice at her command! Unfortunately I had no such friend.

Should I write the letter myself, anonymously to him as a friend? No; I reflected that anonymous letters are mean and dishonorable. Should I write it and sign it with my own name? Never, never!

So I ruminated about the garden planning vegetables till the first bell rang. I would not obey its summons; I would not meet them—those who had scorned me, who had held me cheap, who had slandered me! I felt that dinner would choke me eaten in their presence—indeed I longed for the thought of being indebted any longer to the Tredennicks for their hospitality; I would then be able to tell them how I felt about the debt by their infamous slander.

Perhaps it was hunger that conquered pride, or perhaps it was that, when the second bell rang, it sounded like the bell of my last opportunity of taking my revenge. When I heard it I suddenly changed my mind—I would dine with them; if I did not, they might suspect that I had heard them; and, after all, the

dinner was of Lady Tredennick's providing, and not of Helen's, though I was admitted to it by favor of Kendrick. Something might be done during this last evening to show him his mistake and my indifference. I flew into my little bedroom, put on the simple Sunday frock that was doing duty for evening dress, and hurried into the dining-room as the fish was being served.

Lady Tredennick scolded me a little, but I did not mind. I hardly heard her, and I was rather glad of an excuse for being silent. I did not glance at Helen and Kendrick, who were talking about their London engagements. Lady Tredennick of course was full of London too, for they were almost there already, since they had had half a dozen engagements for the next day; and naturally I was not included in the conversation—in my loneliness I knew nothing of such high matters. But the exclusion, the consciousness of being out in the cold and far away from all the pleasure and brilliancy immediately before them, and in which my birth gave me the right to share, did not tend to soothe my lacerated feelings.

All the evening it was the same—they talked of nothing but town, and their balls and water-parties and theatricals, and State-concerts and State balls, and also of stories and scandals that were afloat. I took up a book and pretended to read it, while I brooded over my wrongs and kept exciting my thirst for vengeance. This state of affairs did not last for very long—Lady Tredennick had consented to my dining at eight, but she set her face against my setting up later than ten. So at ten I went to wish her good night, as she dozed in her arm-chair, and my last chance was over of showing Helen and Kendrick that I would not marry him if the one alternative were to be death by torture.

They were standing on the veranda, star-gazing. There seemed to be no reason why I should go out of my way to say good night to them. I went out into the hall to find my candle; and certainly there was a heavy pain at my heart—I felt so uncommonly small. Not even my pedigree, if proclaimed at that moment to an accompaniment of trumpets by all the kings-at-arms and heralds, would have given me small thrill of satisfaction or drowned the echo in my heart of those unkind words of Helen's, or made me feel anything but a wretched poor little relative who could step out of the room and never be missed, whom nobody cared—

"Going already!" exclaimed a kind voice; and to my astonishment, I found Kendrick had come out to me in the hall. I experienced a thrill of gladness for one minute; then returning memory made me feel quite frigid again.

"I always go at ten. Good night," I said coldly. "But it is the last night," he urged; "and I have seen nothing of you all the evening."

There was a look of such wifely kindness shining in his eyes, such affectionate pleading in his voice, that I might have relented, and we might have ended our short friendship with a friendly good-bye at least; but Helen came to the drawing-room door at that moment, and crashed the last little trembling hope.

I snatched my hand from his, and turned and ran up stairs. I did not hear what she said; I heard only a little cold laugh from Helen, which hurried my feet as if I were running from an adder. Then, when I reached my room, I saw what I had done.

What folly had prompted me to start and fly like a detected criminal? Why, I had done the very thing that was wanted if anything was wanted, to make him think I had misunderstood his kindness! I stamped and paced about my little room; I clenched my hands—I dare say I gnashed my teeth—certainly I must have done something that anybody in a frayed of anger could do. When I was tired of prancing about the room like a mad thing, I flung myself across my bed in utter despair.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" I moaned. "He thinks that I am in love with him—Helen has told him so—and that I think he wants to marry me. Oh, if he would only ask me, I would let him see!" I could not lie there forever. Soon I heard sounds about the passages—the servants were going to bed. Lady Tredennick was nervous about fire, and would be cross if my light was not out when she herself went to bed. I got up wearily. I had set my candle as usual on my writing-table, in spite of my frenzied passion, for it was now quite a mechanical custom of mine to write my diary the last thing at night; my blotting-book pen and ink were there. A sudden inspiration seized me to write an indignant—no, a haughty refusal of Kendrick's heart and hand, just to relieve myself by seeing how it looked on paper.

I sat down and scribbled on a torn half-sheet of note-paper—

"Mr. Tredennick—Allow me to tell you that I consider this offer you have made to me the most analogous piece of impertinence—"

I laughed. That really was too strong, I would try again.

"Miss Tredennick-Luce presents her compliments to Mr. Kendrick Tredennick, and begs to decline—"

No, that would not do; for I had been taught that a letter must be invariably answered in the same person in which it is written; and no body would dream of mak-

ing an offer of marriage in the third person.

I began again. "Dear Mr. Tredennick—I hated the 'dear' but, after all, it was a merely formal expression, and no more meant than he was dear to me than princes and peers mean that they are obedient servants of all sorts of people because they end their letters in that way—I beg to thank you for the offer of marriage you have made me, and regret to inform you that it is impossible for me to accept it. Permit me to add that, considering how very short our acquaintance has been, your offer strikes me less as a compliment than as an impertinent presumption. There is no one in the world who could have surprised me more by a proposal of marriage, as you are the very last person I could think of marrying."

"Yours truly, "VIOLET TREDENNICK-LUCE"

When I read that one through, it seemed horribly silly, undignified, and ungrammatical. I should not have said "regret," for that was a lie; and I must try to arrange the sense of the rest of the letter so it should sound freezing and not petulant. I flung that too upon the floor and began another.

"Dear Mr. Tredennick—I was extremely surprised—"

"Good gracious! What are you doing at this time of night?" I heard a voice say close beside me.

I sprang from the chair and faced the speaker, forgetful of my tear-stained cheeks and swollen eyes. I had not heard the door open, being too much absorbed in composition.

"What do you want?" I cried fiercely.

"Upon my word, you are polite!" said Helen, in her calm cold way. "I saw your light, and I was afraid you were ill, so I came to help you. If I had come to murder you, you could not glare at me more. You have certainly a very strange way of receiving kindnesses!"

"You have no business in my room!" I said passionately, ashamed of my inflamed wet face, now that I saw her contemptuous eyes taking note of it. "Your room is at the other end of the house. You come to spy upon me. Let me alone!"

"My dear child, don't be so absurd!" she expostulated. "People will think there is something odd about you. Mr. Tredennick said just now that you must be crazy. What made you rush off in that rude way, you little goose?"—and she laughed in an indulgent way that was intensely exasperating.

Then I saw her eyes rest upon the sheet of paper on my writing-table; there were only a few words, and before I realized that she could read them at one glance, I blew out the candle and we were both in darkness.

"Violet," she said solemnly, in the midst of the gloom, "you have been very silly. You have flung yourself at Mr. Tredennick's head, and because he has amused himself with you—perhaps petted you, as he would any younger cousin—"

"How dare you?" I cried fiercely. "I know what you think, and I tell you I hate him, and I would not marry him if he were a prince! It is your jealousy; you want him yourself—any one can see that! But he does like me better than you, only I would not marry him—not if I had to be torn in pieces instead!"

"You had little thing," I heard her say—I could not see her, but she spoke like one who had been stung and was just recovering—"you deserve to be whipped and locked up! You will disgrace yourself and all of us if you go on like this. I shall speak to my mother about you."

She was out of the room, for her voice receded, and then the door was shut. I was glad I said it. All my rage was gone, for my shaft had struck home; I knew it by her pause, and by the jerky gasping way in which she had spoken.

I lighted my candle again and looked the door. Then with quite a light heart, I went over to the dressing-table to get ready for bed. The room looked very empty—my fragmentary letters were lying all over the place. I amiled grimly as I picked them up, I did not read them over, but tore them up and burnt them in my empty grate. The only one I remembered distinctly was the shortest—the one on the table—because Helen might have seen it.

"Dear Mr. Tredennick—I was extremely surprised—"

I laugh to myself to think how it must have puzzled her—if she saw it—to understand what on earth I could be writing to him about. I had hoped she did see it—it would puzzle and surprise her so, and add so much to her jealousy. But as she made no remark upon it, and asked no questions, I was sure she had not seen it. So I went to bed and slept the sleep of the just and avenged.

What I am going to tell you now is of course merely hearsay, since I was not present; but I had it from a most trustworthy source, and can answer for its correctness.

Helen was at a great reception at the Foreign Office, and very late in the evening Kendrick arrived upon the scene. He took her aside, and she asked him "very seriously what was the matter, for he looked white and strange."

"Helen," he said, "will you help me to unravel a mystery? A cruel trick has been played upon me and on your cousin Violet Luce too. It is far crueler to her than to me, poor child—though, fortunately for her, the perpetrator of the joke has made a mistake, and the arrow has missed her and struck me."

"What on earth do you mean, Kendrick?" asked Helen, fanning herself gently. "I know nothing of any trick."

"You know of nobody capable of writing a letter in my name?"

"No," she replied slowly, as if wondering and considering.

"Somebody—I rely upon you not telling any one, Helen," he said earnestly—"not even your mother or Violet herself, promise me."

"I promise," she said, quite as earnestly.

"Some one has actually had the effrontery—the cruelty—to write a letter containing an offer of marriage purporting to be from me to poor little Violet Luce."

"Never!" she exclaimed, with a little laugh.

"It is so," he replied. "Tell me, Helen—on your sacred word of honor, have you any idea who can have written that letter?"

"On my sacred word of honor—no!" said Helen.

He was relieved, but horribly ashamed of himself. Of course a Tredennick could not lie—of that there could be no doubt. A Tredennick was equally incapable of falsehood and treachery; and he blushed that he should have mentally dishonored his race by doubting one bearing his name.

"Some one has written such a letter," he said gloomily.

[Continued next week.]

The Great Strike.

Hello! Hello, there! Mr. Digestion! What's the matter with you down there?

Hello! Mr. Tongue, is that you? Oh, everything is wrong down here. The hands in the Gastric Works have "struck." The Food Assimilation Company have "shut down," and the Bile Supply Pipe Line can't handle their product, and it has overflowed the whole region. Yes, all stock on hand in my apartments has "heated" and "soured." I have stopped work altogether. Can't move without assistance. Say, Mr. Tongue, can't you send down to me a bottle or two of Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery? Yes, that Buffalo man's remedy. If you do, I can start up at once. When the liver, stomach or bowels are deranged or the digestive "forces" are "on a strike," it is the best "agent" to set the wheels of nature in motion. Druggists have it.

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