# KATE VALLIANT.

—OR—

## With -:- the -:- Circus !

(Continued.)

'That is being too exacting on behalf of your sister,' she said, faintly coloring. 'You let her go to a place I abominate, and then want me to accompany her, and so seem to sanction that of which I thoroughly disapprove.'

'But you disapprove on such impossible grounds,' he urged.

'Impossible, are they? 'Kate has been in love with riding, all her life,' you told me once. I now tell you she's in love with a rider—who has been your stable-boy.'

'If I forbid her going—if I disappoint the child—will you take it as evidence of my belief in what you say?'

'Undoubtedly I shall—and so will everyone else,' she said defiantly.

'Then Kate and I will go together; it shall never be thought that her own brother wronged her by degrading suspicions.'

He spoke so hotly and turned away so abruptly, to conceal his indignation, that he did not catch the quick, triumphant glance, which flashed from Blanche's eyes across the room to Godfrey.

In justice to Godfrey, it must be told that he did not flash back a similar one. On the contrary, he lowered his eyes, and though the blood rushed to his forehead, it was rather the scorch of shame which be felt, than a glow of triumph or satisfaction.

'Now the question arises, dear, how shall we all go to the circus, this afternoon?'

Philip addressed his sister cheerfully and pointedly, but a conviction that he had been goaded into his line of action assailed Kate's mind.

'Supposing we give it up, Phil? If the others don't care about going, I'll give it up, and explain away our absence pleasantly to Ralph,' she said eagerly, and Miss Carroll's comment on Kate's surrender of her desire to go, settled Philip in his determination.

'We none of us doubt that you could soothe Ralph's outraged feelings, but why take the office of comforter upon yourself, Kate? Philip is willing to go with you to-day! why disarrange this plan, and make a new one, which will give you the trouble of privately interviewing the sensitive circus-rider?'

'How curiously you twist what I say, about,' Kate expostulated, 'and—'

'Say no more dear, we go!' Philip said firmly. 'Aunt Laurence, will Mrs. Carroll Fred and you, go in the landau? Kate, Godfrey and I will go in the dogcart——'

'I have to see a man this afternoon about the site for the proposed new church schools at Straceyleigh,' Godfrey interrupted. 'Lord Marlpit has promised a site, and——'

'Oh! of course, business before pleasure old fellow!' Philip said, heartily. 'If you can, do please the Straceyleighites about the school site. The schools have been hanging fire for years through the half-feeble, half-felonious conduct of the old chap who was vicar there formerly. I'll let you have five feet deep of that red marble quarry for the benefit of the little church Lord Marlpit is going to build.'

"In fact, you'll do all you can to better my position,' Godfrey cried, hilariously, trying to cover under the veil of gaiety something like real emotion which his cousin's generous words had called forth.

'Make the most of your opportunities and get through all the business you can this afternoon, Godfrey,' Fred struck in sarcastically. 'If I had not, as in social duty bound, agreed to my host's disposition of my afternoon hours, I'd have offered to help you to interview the man about the school site and the quarry for the church.'

'Women are in the way at business interviews between agents and builders—'

'Are they, Godfrey? Then I won't suggest that Blanch should help you with her advice instead of me.'

'If Blanche takes my advice, she will spend the whole of this afternoon resting.' Mrs. Carroll spoke with nervous solemnity, the cause of which was quite apparent to keen-eyed Fred.

'Oh, Mrs. Carroll! Shame! shame! Would you encourage young people in habits of indolence? Blanche is quite well and strong, why shouldn't she improve the shining hours of this lovely August day in helping my brother to look at sites and marble?'

'I think we had all better go to luncheon, and then get ourselves off to Cartil's Circus,' Mrs. Beaufort said, appealing to Kate. 'Let us set an example of energy, Kate; we'll rearrange your brother's programme. Let the Admiral go in the landau with mamma and your aunt, and you and I will go in the dog-cart with the groom. Phil can then stay and amuse Blanche.'

'Blanche must excuse me for once. I am going with my sister.'

Mrs. Beaufort heaved an impatient, angry sigh.

'These people are wilfully blinding themselves,' she thought angrily; 'that dear, trustworthy girl is being made the scapegoat of Miss Blanche's machinations. What a fool Philip is, and what a fine glorious fellow! And what a greater fool Godfrey is! She'll never sacrafice a jot for him, but she'll wring honor and manliness and gratitude out of his being and she will pride herself on keeping her head all the time, and sit in the seat of the scornful above him. Poor Philip!'

### CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. BEAUFORT INTERVENING.

'May I stay at home with you, Blanche? I'm sure you're not well.'

It was just as they were about to start for the afternoon performance at Straceyleigh that Mrs. Beaufort said this to her sister, coming into the latter's room and finding her lying on the sofa, with the room well darkened.

'Thank you, Lou, but if you can believe it I can endure my own thoughts and society for two or three hours.'

Mrs. Beaufort was rearranging the cream lace round her throat before the glass; therefore her sister's face was unseen by her.

But in some way or other it was impressed upon her that Blanche's face was not good to look at as she spoke.

'Will you open your eyes and tell me if I'm tidy?' Mrs. Beaufort went on, dancing away from the glass ,and bending a floating mass of creamy lace and fawn-colored silk over Blanche's recumbent form.

'You look like choclate froth,' Blanche said, lazily opening her eyes. 'What did you look like, I wonder—what could we both have looked like—in the old days, before you married Admiral Beaufort?'

'Ghastly, in ill-contrived dresses,' Mrs Beaufort responded promptly. 'Well, I've never punished my old man for his goodness to me—mind you're able to say the same about Philip by-and-by. Dear Philip! What a good fellow he is, Blanche! I—I wish you would go with him this afternoon.'

'Please turn that blind, so as to keep the glare out of my eyes, and don't worry me any more,' Blanche said, pointing languidly to the venetian blind. 'You don't know all I have to go through just now, because I make no sign of weariness. But how would you like to be dragged out in the heat to select a proper position for a young larch, or spruce, or silver leech, or gold birch, or some one of the uninteresting hundreds of young evergreens he's planting about the place. I'm delighted at the prospect of having myself to myself this afternoon. So now go, without any more fuss, you flake of choclate froth.'

'Keep yourself to yourself, then,' Mrs. Beaufort cried, floating out of the room. But her spirits were not nearly as airy as her manner.

On her way down she met Godfrey walking rapidly along the corridor, his hunting crop in his hand.

'You ride this afternoon, Mr. Wyndham?' she asked.

'Yes, and I want to be off now, at once,' he answered, passing her hurriedly, 'I have more on my hands than I can get through——'

'Go now, at once, for Heaven's sake, and don't come back till after we return,' she pleaded, moved by a sudden impulse. Mr. Wyndham promise me this. I am full of groundless alarms to-day.'

His answer was apparently irrelevant.

'Why does you sister want to see me alone?'

'Why, indeed! she shall not do it! I speak in your interest more than hers. She is so cool and calculating, that whatever happens, she will be above suspicion her character will invite and defy investigation! But for you—for you, whom she has thrown aside for a richer man, I feel miserably anxious. You could never bear to face your cousin if you did him the wrong of holding secret, sentimental intercourse with her. It would never be worse than that, but the meanness of that would crush you.'

She spoke excitedly but clearly.

'You shall see me ride away and on my honor I'll stay away till you come back.'

'She and you had planned Philip's absence, as I thought—as I feared. How could you do it?'

There was such contempt and reproach in her tone that he could not answer her for a few moments. Then he said:

'I am the one to blame. Never think hardly of her. Her only fault has been that of showing too much consideration for such a sneak as I feel myself to be now. Think as well as you can of her, though, Mrs. Beaufort. I shall go off now and transact this business, and then go straight up to town, where Lord Marlpit happens to be, and resign the agency. In five minutes Hasselton will have seen the last of me.'

'Well done! I'll stay and pack for you she said her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm.

'You can trust me. You needn't stay to see me off. I can do my packing myself.'

He spoke so humbly, and he looked so handsome, that for a moment the impetuous woman's heart softened towards him in the wrong way. That is to say, she almost felt inclined to go, and give the self-banished lover the chance of one more sight of Blanche. Then the weak moment passed. and she forced him to make the final effort, to take the leap over the gulf that must hereafter separate him from her sister.

'Can you promise for her, Mr. Wyndham? Can you pledge yourself that her regard for you, her desire to see you and sway you, will not urge her to seek you rashly, and—ruin herself in the eyes of your cousin Philip?'

She asked her questions sorrowfully, not angrily, and Godfrey Wyndham made no attempt to answer them in words. He just pressed her hand warmly and went away.

At the last instant, when all the others were assembled ready to get into their respective carriages, Mrs. Beaufort ran out and explained, as brightly as if there were no sympathetic tears trembling beneath her eyelids, that she 'was going to stay and pack for Godfrey, who was unexpectedly called to London.'

'I ought to be the one to stay and pack for my brother!' Fred said' but the offer of her services was but limply made. She was still sufficiently the slave of her liking for Philip to enjoy the idea of being seated next to him, and of securing the greater portion of his attention to herself during the hour or two of the circus. He would take off and put on her light wrap. He would laugh with her over the high-sounding nomenclature of horses and riders. He would in fact bestow upon her all the little delicate attentions, offer her all the little nameless services, which are the right of the only young lady from the only young man of a party

Accordingly she readily allowed Mrs. Beaufort to give up going under the poor pretence of staying behind to pack for Godfrey. 'I believe they're both in love with him, and the married one is trying to outwit Blanche,' Fred thought charitably, but she offered no further opposition to Mrs, Beaufort's proposal. It was pleasant to her that both the sisters should remain behind, leaving the field open to her. It was also pleasant to her that Blanche should be outwitted.

The landau drove off followed by the dog-cart, and Mrs. Beaufort retraced her steps into the house. Now that they were gone. now that Godfrey had ridden off and Blanche remained secluded in her room, the married sister began to experience the sensation of having done something foolish and uncalled-for. After all, the packing up for Godfrey, which she had assigned as a reason for remaining behind, could not be done by her until he came back to direct her; and he had promised not to come back till the others returned from the circus. 'I believe, too, that he'll keep his promise,' she thought. and she began to hope that her sister would not hear that she had stayed at home.

Blanche, meanwhile, who had not been able to witness the departure of the party who had gone to the circus, and who was consequently ignorant of the fact of her sister having stayed at home threw off all semblance of fatigue and desire for rest as the sound of the carriage wheels died away in the distance. She rose from the sofa walked swiftly to the window, ran up the carefully closed blind and looked out eagerly in the direction of a small copse known as the Wilderness, to the left of the lawn.

After a watch of a few minutes she grew impatient and muttering something about 'men being such idiots, they always made a bungle of the smallest matter that had a dash of difficulty in it, she went and stood for another minute before the glass, rearranging her hair, and placing a hat upon it becomingly. Then she slipped off her engagement ring, laughing as she did it.

'It will appeal to him, this little suggestive hint that I couldn't bear to hurt his feelings by the sight of it, when it's possible to spare him,' she thought. Then, with a parting glance at the beautiful face that endowed her with the power of giving exquisite pleasure and exquisite pain to men who were much nobler than herself, she walked slowly and gracefully downstairs, and then out of the house through the conservatory.

In passing, she had brushed against the fronds of a gigantic fern, on the other side of which Mrs. Beaufort was sitting reading. But Blanche was so pre-occupied that she did not see the figure of her sister, slightly veiled as it was by the kindly fern, and so she went on her way uninterruptedly.

In a moment Mrs. Beaufort's indignation and alarm, feelings which had been couchant for a quarter of an hour, rose up strengthened by this apparent confirmation of the justice of them. (They had planned a meeting out of the house—they'er both deceiving me,') she thought. ('His riding away was only a ruse; he has only ridden to some out of the way place to meet her.')

She rose up, and followed scarcely knowing what she should do or say if she came upon the unscrupulous pair, and yet never hesitating for a moment to baffle them if she could. Her wrath rose high against them both, as she skimmed along in the wake of her sister. They should not have a chance of arranging another secret meeting, of that she was determined. She would run undignified as the action would be rather than let Blanche gain the shelter of the Wilderness, and elude her.

The distance between them was lessening each moment, and the idea struck Mrs. Beaufort that the chase must have rather a queer appearance if any of the servants were seeing it from the windows of the house.

('They'll put two and two together, and do the sum correctly,' she thought with keen mortification: 'they'll guess why I stayed at home, and they'll distrust and despise their future mistress, even if they don't contrive to let Philip know all about it. At any rate, it will give them a hold on her which, by-and-by, for all her coolness, she'll not dare to defy. What a fool the girl is! and what a traitor she has made of Godfrey!')

Blanche—still unconscious of the flying footsteps behind her—had gained the wood now, and, quickening her pace, began to thread the intricate paths, which were hedged off from observation by thick wildly-growing laureli, with the ease of one acquainted with them. When Mrs. Beaufort gained the border of the wood she saw no trace of her sister. And after wandering vaguely backwards and forwards for a few minutes, she was obliged to own herself baulked!

Her satisfaction would have been intense, and her fears considerably assuaged, if she could only have known that if she was baulked, Blanche was utterly defeated. When the latter come to the pretty evergreen secluded trysting place where she had insisted that Godfrey should meet her, she found no living object there but a blackbird on a bush, and a toad in the wet grass.

('And it's twenty minutes after the time I appointed; what a coward! to fear the meeting because Philip trusts him.')

With hardly curbed impatience, she waited there for another twenty minutes. Then she heard footsteps approaching, light, hesitating footsteps, as if the one that was taking them was uncertain of the road. 'Stupid fellow! he's forgotten my directions and lost himself,' she thought smilingly, her amiability quite restored by the conviction that she had carried her point and brought the man to her feet again, against his honor and his will. Then she spoke aloud:

'You're close to the wren's nest now Godfrey; leave the arbutus to your left——' then checked herself in speechless amaze as Mrs. Beaufort walked in instead of Godfrey!

There was a silence full of rage and fury on the one side, of sorrow and contempt on the other, for a few moments. Then the giultier and less embarrassed sister broke it:

'How do you dare to dog me and spy upon me?' Blanche cried in a voice of concentrated passion and disappointment; 'Don't think you've done any good by your spying and sneaking after me. After all, what have you discovered? I have come out for a walk alone—in the grounds that will soon be my own. What can you make of that?'

'Nothing, if it were not for your own words. You forget that you addressed Godfrey by name when you heard me coming. Thank God, you were mistaken—he is a better fellow than you think him. He has fled from temptation! he has gone away!'

'Gone!'

There was something tragic in the intensity of feeling displayed by this cold, calculating, callous woman, when she heard that her Samson had gone; left her to bear the brunt of her own folly and reckless wickedness, her own insatiable vanity and cruel folly—alone!

'Gone!' In her wrath, in the defiant spirit which this unexpected check had evoked, Blanche repeated her exclamation regardless of the deductions her sister might draw from it. Uneasily Mrs. Beaufort began to recognize the impossibility of having done more harm than good by the course she had pursued. Perhaps Blanche had really meant to let Love be the lord of all, to resign riches and Philip, and cling to Godfrey! Then the absurdity of such a supposition struck her! There was nothing ivy-like about Blanche. What she needed for support were the substantials that came from a good banking account and prolific acres. No! there had been no wild romance in the latest departure in the affair between Blanche and Godfrey. It was all vanity and cruelty on the woman's part, weakness of will and strength of passion on the part of the man! Strengthening herself with this reflection, the married sister spoke:

'You need not doubt it, Godfrey is 'gone,' if not from Hasselton altogether, at least from you. I did stay home this afternoon to act the miserable part of detective because I saw you were bent on bringing ruin upon everyone within reach of you, if you were left to yourself. Oh! Blanche! why is it that, holding such a fate as you do in the hollow of your hand, you still go on being yourself? Let Godfrey go in peace if you mean fairly by Philip Wyndham. If not I've nothing to say, only I pity Godfrey.'

'I mean to be mistress of Hasselton; you needn't trouble yourself about me.'

She turned and walked away through the labyrinth of evergreens as she spoke and Mrs. Beaufort, who was not accustomed to the way, was compelled by the instinct of self-preservation to follow closely. They crossed the lawn together by tacit consent. They neither of them wished to excite further critical attention from the servants who might chance to be looking from the windows. At the entrance-door Mrs. Beaufort made one last effort to put the understanding between her sister and herself on a sure and fair footing.

'You won't bear any malice against me for this, Blanche, will you? I acted so entirely for your good.'

'People have a habit of saying that when they misjudge and impute all manner of evil and folly to one.'

'But as things have turned out, you will bury the hatchet, won't you?'

'We shall always seem to be very good friends, I suppose, Lou. Philip likes you and I shall never heedlessly endanger my own happiness by heedlessly running counter to any of his harmless fancies.'

'Is to be Philip, then?—tho' you have fooled poor Godfrey up to this very day?' Mrs. Beaufort allowed herself to get angry as she questioned thus.

Blanche remained maddeningly cool as she answered.

'None but a fool would ever have supposed for a moment that it could possibly be any one but Philip, as Philip owns Hasselton.'

'Ah, Blanche don't say that, it's too heartless. I'm sure poor Godfrey Wyndham believed to-day, that you were ready to break with Philip for his sake.'

'Then he was a fool, a mistaken fool, I am sorry to say; but if he thought so why did'nt he put me to the test, and keep his appointment?'

'Can you ask 'why?' He remembered his honor——'

'When he was reminded of it by you,' Blanche interrupted. 'Well, all's well that ends well. Godfrey has loved—'and fridden away,' and I can assure you very ully and with the most perfect equanimity that it is Philip whom I intend to marry. You need not do duenna for me any more.'

To be Continued.


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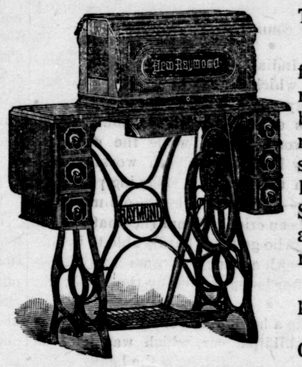


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