

Kitty's Triumph.

"Mr. Bellair—Miss Lofton."

That introduction was the event of the evening. Every girl in the room knew just how Kitty Lofton looked at that moment—just how Mr. Bellair looked at her, and, leaning back against a pillar near Kitty's chair, began to chat.

"You are a stranger among us, Miss Lofton."

"Rather; but I am at home. I have been away all summer. Orchardville is my home; I was born here."

"Allow me to congratulate Orchardville."

"Thank you! Allow me to congratulate you that you were not born here, Mr. Bellair!"

Mr. Bellair laughed, and settled himself more comfortably against his pillar.

"Certainly a very pretty place, and exceedingly nice social life. That is generally the advantage of Eastern over Western towns. The people, as a rule, are better educated, more refined. There is less scramble to get money, and more enjoyment of it. Have you ever been West, Miss Lofton?"

"Never."

Mr. Bellair evidently made a mental memorandum.

Then Kitty turned her nice profile a little more, and arranged the *Marchal* buds of her bouquet, and the girls saw that the coral tips and the curled, black lashes seemed to hold Mr. Bellair's eyes like a magnet.

But he looked down at the tips of his polished boots at last, and began explaining to her about the excursion-party who were coming West in October, related some facts in reference to Chicago, and then—

"Supper is ready. May I bring you some oysters?"

Twenty pairs of red lips pouted, twenty pairs of pretty shoulders turned away in a huff, for it was evident that Mr. Bellair meant to devote himself to Kitty Lofton during the remainder of the evening.

"I knew it would be so when Kitty came—I just knew it!" exclaimed May Morton.

"Oh, well," laughed Lu Dashington, "if you knew it, what is the use of getting mad? You didn't expect to get Mr. Bellair, did you?"

"Of course not! Nobody need expect anything when Kitty's round."

"Quite a triumph for Kit," remarked Lu, composedly, an hour later, as she saw Mr. Bellair, with that young lady's scarlet shawl over his arm, escorting her down the stairs.

"He's going home with her. I wonder if she knows how rich he is, and what a splendid place Three Elms is!"

Of course she did. Lu discovered that immediately when she pounced upon Kitty, in the street, the next day.

"Nobody but himself and father, and they are immensely rich, they say—perfectly affluent, you know, Kit! Old Mr. Bellair is a fortune teller, so he's accepted your father's invitation to take tea at your house to-night? Well, you're too awfully lucky, Kit. You're the only girl he's looked at more than a minute, and he's never taken anybody home. Been here three weeks, you know, visiting the Thayers, and strolling about like a Grand Mogul."

Kitty's black eyes sparkled under their curled lashes. Never was a proud girl more ambitious than Kitty Lofton. She exulted in the impression she had made on Mr. Bellair, and she meant to keep her own counsel.

"Oh, yes," she said; "papa knew old Mr. Bellair very well when they were boys. And, by-the-way, Brother Alf is going out with the excursion party. I think he will take me with him."

"Then you'll see Three Elms. How perfectly splendid!"

Kitty shrugged her shawled shoulders with an air which meant everything or nothing, and turned away, flushed and radiant, exultation deep in her heart. She knew she was beautiful—could shine in society. She had never meant to marry in Orchardville.

Mr. Bellair stayed late at Doctor Lofton's that evening. He seemed to like Kitty's home, and Kitty's bewitching costumes, for he was there two successive evenings. To be sure the Thayers were there, also; but every one could see which way the tide was turning for Kitty Lofton.

In a week everybody in town was talking of her conquest—saying that an exceedingly nice match it would be for her—for Mr. Bellair was seen with her daily. She rode, drove and rowed with him, chaperoned by her mamma, of course; but no one believed Mrs. Lofton, delightful old lady that she was, to be the attraction. It was Kitty, and it would all certainly end in an engagement.

Kitty meant that it should, and her parents looked on and approved; but Alf Lofton observed incredulously, and remarked sagely:

"Arthur Bellair is more of a catch than Kit thinks. You are not perfection, my dear sister. Look out he doesn't find it out."

Kitty curled her coral lips.

"Thank you, my Lord Persimmon! We all know how complimentary brothers always are."

Miss Kitty, looking exceedingly pretty in her cream-colored cashmere morning wrapper and scarlet ribbons, turned haughtily to her practice again. The slim, jeweled fingers traversed the ivory keys of the piano deftly; but Kitty was secretly a little uneasy, and privately resolved to be very gentle and aristocratic, and keep her sharp little tongue between her teeth. A certain unfeeling courtesy and moderation in Mr. Bellair had already impressed her, and she very much admired his "nice manners."

Perhaps the petted and spoiled girl felt that the young man's sweetness of temper and kindness to all about him was not mere outside polish; but she was not given to looking much below the surface, and did not even know how thoroughly a gentleman Arthur Bellair was.

Alf, who saw even more of him than she did, regretfully reviewed his sister's shortcomings, and very much doubted if her attraction for the handsome Chicagoan would end in marriage.

Mr. Bellair's six weeks' Eastern visit came to an end at last. He realized

thoughtfully how full of pretty Kitty Lofton the latter part had been. The sparkling brunette face was very fascinating to him, the family respectable—and his father wanted him to marry.

Arthur Bellair was exceedingly fond of his father. All that was creditable in him he said he owed to that good old man's quiet example—an unstinted lover of flowers, and peace and good-will toward men.

Kitty seemed to Arthur Bellair the gayest and prettiest girl he had ever known. Her figure was very charming. From his first moment of attraction, he had resolved to know more of her; and now, after many companionable interviews, he had not quite made up his mind regarding his own wishes.

"I wonder how father would like her?" he kept saying to himself, and went up to Doctor Lofton's to make his adieu.

Kitty saw him come into the yard. She was in her chamber; she hurriedly fastened the pink corals, that were so becoming into her little ears, and went down. But he talked of the Thayers and Orchardville people in general, and for a time made no allusion to herself.

At last:

"It has been such a delightful summer that I have accepted everybody's invitation to come again. I have solemnly promised to bring little Pinky Thayer a Christmas box; but before that, I shall see you at Three Elms. Alf has promised to bring you out with the excursionists."

Kitty assented.

"I want you to see Three Elms, and—my father," added Arthur Bellair, thoughtfully.

"I shall be very happy," said Kitty, sweetly, but a little alarmed that Mr. Bellair had risen and taken his hat.

Yes, it was certain that there was to be no offer, for her papa indiscreetly came in to say good-by; and there was Alf, who was to drive to the depot with the traveler. Kitty bit her red lips till the blood came, but still smiled sweetly when Mr. Bellair shook both her jeweled hands and departed.

If she had known that he rode away with a heavy heart and many misgivings as to the wisdom of not confessing a word of his feelings, she might have taken consolation for her disappointment. But Kitty kept her own counsel and there were only three weeks till the first of October, the time for the excursionists starting.

Mr. and Mrs. Thayer left Orchardville with Alf and Kitty, and joined the rest of the party in Boston. The weather was splendid, and everybody in excellent spirits. The Thayers were going to Three Elms, while the rest of the party sojourned at a hotel in Chicago, and Mr. Bellair charged me on no account to fail to bring you with me, Kitty. His carriage will be sent in, you may be sure, and take us at once to Three Elms," said Mrs. Thayer.

With such brightening prospects, Miss Kitty held her pretty head correspondingly high. Her traveling dress was very elegant and becoming, and supposing they were to remain at Three Elms for a few days, the most elaborate costumes lay packed in her capacious trunks. The good taste of this arrangement might have been doubted by some; with Kitty there was no doubt whatever, though Alf scolded over those trunks, and dubbed her Miss Flora McFlimsy.

But on the bright afternoon they reached Chicago, Kitty's gay spirits were seriously clouded by an accident which had happened to her pretty traveling silk. Some lemonade had been spilled upon it, disfiguring it slightly, but to Kitty the matter was weighty.

"Just arrived, and my elegant appearance spoiled!" she murmured, discontentedly.

Mrs. Thayer, who had suffered several hours from sick headache, had fallen asleep upon a travelling-cushion, and Kitty was sitting in a silent fit of the sulks, when a bent old gentleman asked leave to occupy the vacant seat by the latter. He had evidently entered the train at the last station, and had not yet been able to find a seat.

"The seat is occupied," said Kitty, curtly.

The old gentleman looked wistfully at Kitty's luncheon case, which was the only "occupant," and was turning away when Alf jumped up.

"No, it isn't, Kit. You've a right to only half a seat. You can sit down here, sir," and he promptly stowed the box into the rack overhead.

The old man, evidently very weary, sat down, and Kitty tossed her head.

"My dress will look nice to go to Three Elms, jammed up in this way," she said, angrily, drawing her raiment from the old man's dusty boots, though he was very careful not to inconvenience her.

He looked at her with a half-murmur of apology, but she scornfully averted her flushed face. Alf, ashamed of his sister's ill-temper, withdrew the old man's attention by a few civil remarks, and made an effort to put him at his ease.

The stranger was well dressed, but was evidently one of those exceedingly modest and amiable souls who often get rudely jostled in this selfish world. He looked mildly at him, surveyed Mrs. Thayer's sleeping face, and at last asked Alf if he understood the young lady correctly—if they were going to Three Elms.

Alf assented, and pleasantly continued the conversation.

"You are familiar with the place, do you say? It is a very beautiful estate, is it not?" he asked, leaning nearer to the old gentleman.

"It is considered so. It has cost the owner much labor; but he has been quite successful in making it what he wished," he replied.

Then Alf, thinking Kitty would be interested, made an effort to include her in the conversation; but she was so evidently inclined to continue her incivility to the old man that he gave it up.

"You are a most delightful travelling companion," Alf remarked, looking as if he would like to shake her, as the train rolled into the Chicago depot.

The excursion-party bustled together, and the old man disappeared as they alighted.

The first face almost that they saw was Arthur Bellair's.

"Come directly to Three Elms," he

said; "my carriage is waiting for you."

With Mrs. Thayer on one arm and Kitty on the other, he led the way, followed by Alf and Dr. Thayer, to an elegant and capacious carriage.

While the party were seating themselves, he absented himself for an instant, and in that time the gentle old man, so objectionable to Letty, approached, and was about to enter the vehicle.

"This is not a public carriage, sir!" exclaimed Miss Kitty, resentfully.

"I am aware that it is not. It is my own," returned the old man, mildly, and turned to be presented at once by his son.

"My father, ladies!" said Arthur Bellair.

But Mrs. Thayer had already clasped the hand of her old friend.

Well, Kitty went to Three Elms. It was spacious and beautiful, the hospitality magnificent; put soon after their arrival, Arthur Bellair's warm manner turned to the most icy courtesy, as far as Kitty was concerned.

Evidently an early conference with his father informed him that the old gentleman was not prepossessed in her favor, and thus Kitty's triumph ended.

In spite of what everybody had said—in spite of her most becoming toilets, desperately made between hope and despair—she never became Mrs. Arthur Bellair.

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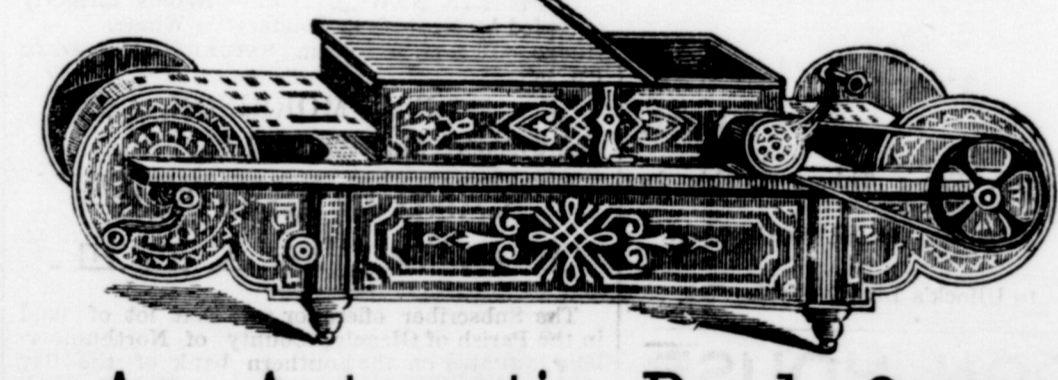
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